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H. G. WELLS
ATLANTIC EDITION**

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**THE WORKS OF
H. G. WELLS
ATLANTIC EDITION
VOLUME VII**



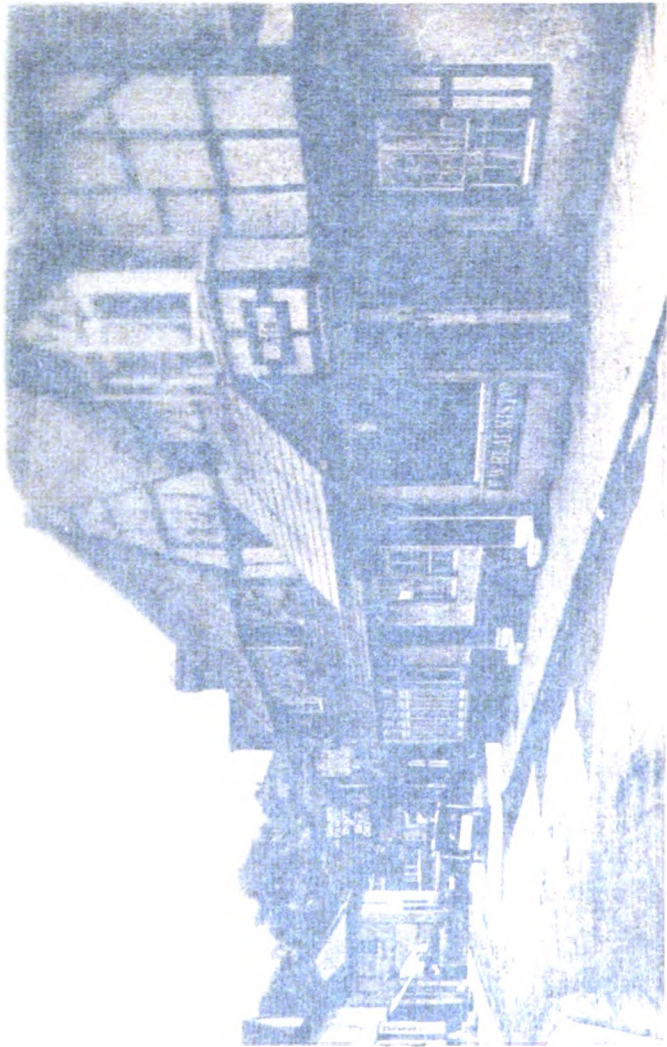
WEST STREET, MIDHURST, SUSSEX

THE WHEELS OF CHANGE
AND MR. LEVETHAM

BY
H. G. WELLS



LONDON
T. FISHER AND WAIN, LTD.
MCMXXV



WEST STREET, MIDHURST, SUSSEX

THE WHEELS OF CHANCE
LOVE AND MR. LEWISHAM

BY
H. G. WELLS



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T. FISHER UNWIN, LTD.
MCMXXV

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PREFACE TO VOLUME VII

“THE WHEELS OF CHANCE” has been held back until this seventh volume, although it was written in 1895 and published as a book in 1896, because it belongs to a distinct group in the writer’s work, a series of close studies in personality which included **“Love and Mr. Lewisham”** (written in 1898), **“Kipps,”** **“Ann Veronica,”** and **“The History of Mr. Polly.”** These four men, Hoopdriver the hero of **“The Wheels of Chance,”** Mr. Lewisham, Kipps, and Mr. Polly, and Ann Veronica are all personalities thwarted and crippled by the defects of our contemporary civilisation. **“The Wheels of Chance”** followed immediately on **“The Wonderful Visit”** and **“The Island of Dr. Moreau.”** It is a very **“young”** book; indeed, in some respects it is puerile, but the character of Hoopdriver saves it from being altogether insignificant. **“Love and Mr. Lewisham,”** also included in this volume, was written three years afterwards, concurrently with **“The Sleeper Awakes.”**

“Love and Mr. Lewisham” was written with greater care than any of the writer’s earlier books. It was consciously a work of art; it was designed to be very clear, simple, graceful, and human. It was not a very successful book, no critic discovered any sort of beauty or technical ability in it, and it was some years before the writer could return, in **“Kipps”** (1905) and **“Tono-Bungay”** (1909), to his attack upon the novel proper.

PREFACE

The picture of West Street, Midhurst, is an illustration to both these stories, for it was Midhurst Grammar School that the author had in mind as Mr. Lewisham's school and Mr. Lewisham, like the author, lodged over the small sweetstuff-shop in West Street next to the Angel, to which inn came Mr. Hoop-driver with mysterious inquiries in protective pursuit of the young lady in grey.

THE WHEELS OF CHANCE

A BICYCLING IDYLL

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THE WHEELS OF CHANCE

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTER IN THE STORY

I



IF you (presuming you are of the sex that does such things)—if you had gone into the Drapery Emporium—which is really only magnificent for shop—of Messrs. Antrobus & Co.—a perfectly fictitious “Co.,” by-the-bye—of Putney, on the 14th of August, 1895, had turned to the right-hand side, where the blocks of white linen and piles of blankets rise up to the rail from which the pink and blue prints depend, you might have been served by the central figure of this story that is now beginning. He would have come forward, bowing and swaying, he would have extended over the counter two hands with largish knuckles and enormous cuffs and he would have asked you, protruding a pointed chin and without the slightest anticipation of pleasure in his manner, what he might have the pleasure of showing you. Under certain circumstances—as, for instance, hats, baby linen, gloves, silks, lace, or curtains—he would simply have bowed politely, and with a drooping expression and making a kind of circular sweep, invited you to “step this way,” and so led you beyond his ken; but under other and happier conditions—huckaback, blankets, dimity, cretonne, linen, calico, are cases in point—he would have requested you to take a seat, empha-

THE WHEELS OF CHANCE

sising the hospitality by leaning over the counter and gripping a chair back in a spasmodic manner, and so proceeded to obtain, unfold, and exhibit his goods for your consideration. Under which happier circumstances you might—if of an observing turn of mind and not too much of a housewife to be human—have given the central figure of this story less cursory attention.

Now if you had noticed anything about him, it would have been chiefly to notice how little he was noticeable. He wore the black morning coat, the black tie, and the speckled grey nether parts (descending into shadow and mystery below the counter) of his craft. He was of a pallid complexion, hair of a kind of dirty fairness, greyish eyes, and a skimpy, immature moustache under his peaked indeterminate nose. His features were all small, but none ill-shaped. A rosette of pins decorated the lapel of his coat. His remarks, you would observe, were entirely what people used to call *cliché*, formulæ not organic to the occasion but stereotyped ages ago and learnt years since by heart. “This, madam,” he would say, “is selling very well.” “We are doing a very good article at four—three a yard.” “We could show you something better, of course.” “No trouble, madam, I assure you.” Such were the simple counters of his intercourse. So, I say, he would have presented himself to your superficial observation. He would have danced about behind the counter, have neatly refolded the goods he had shown you, have put on one side those you selected, extracted a little book with a carbon leaf and a tinfoil sheet from a fixture, made

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTER

you out an account in that weak flourishing hand peculiar to drapers, and have bawled "Sayn!" Then a puffy shop-walker would have come into view, looked at the bill for a second very hard (showing you a parting down the middle of his head meanwhile), have scribbled a still more flourishing J. M. all over the document, have asked you if there was nothing more, have stood by you—supposing that you were paying cash—until the central figure of this story reappeared with the change. One glance more at him, and the puffy shop-walker would have been bowing you out, with fountains of civilities at work all about you. And so the interview would have terminated.

But real literature, as distinguished from anecdote, does not concern itself with superficial appearances alone. Literature is revelation. Modern literature is indecorous revelation. It is the duty of the earnest author to tell you what you would not have seen—even at the cost of some blushes. And the thing that you would not have seen about this young man, and the thing of the greatest moment to this story, the thing that must be told if the book is to be written, was—let us face it bravely—the Remarkable Condition of this Young Man's Legs.

Let us approach the business with dispassionate explicitness. Let us assume something of the scientific spirit, the hard, almost professorial tone of the conscientious realist. Let us treat this young man's legs as a mere diagram, and indicate the points of interest with the unemotional precision of a lecturer's pointer. And so to our revelation. On the internal

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aspect of the right ankle of this young man you would have observed, ladies and gentlemen, a contusion and an abrasion; on the internal aspect of the left ankle a contusion also; on its external aspect a large yellowish bruise. On his left shin there were two bruises, one a leaden yellow graduating here and there into purple, and another, obviously of more recent date, of a blotchy red—tumid and threatening. Proceeding up the left leg in a spiral manner, an unnatural hardness and redness would have been discovered on the upper aspect of the calf, and above the knee and on the inner side, an extraordinary expanse of bruised surface, a kind of closely stippled shading of contused points. The right leg would be found to be bruised in a marvellous manner all about and under the knee, and particularly on the interior aspect of the knee. So far we may proceed with our details. Fired by these discoveries, an investigator might perhaps have pursued his inquiries further—to bruises on the shoulders, elbows, and even the finger joints, of the central figure of our story. He had indeed been bumped and battered at an extraordinary number of points. But enough of realistic description is as good as a feast, and we have exhibited enough for our purpose. Even in literature one must know where to draw the line.

Now the reader may be inclined to wonder how a respectable young shopman should have got his legs, and indeed himself generally, into such a dreadful condition. One might fancy that he had been sitting with his nether extremities in some complicated machinery, a threshing-machine, say, or one of those

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hay-making furies. But Sherlock Holmes (now happily dead) would have fancied nothing of the kind. He would have recognised at once that the bruises on the internal aspect of the left leg, considered in the light of the distribution of the other abrasions and contusions, pointed unmistakably to the violent impact of the Mounting Beginner upon the bicycling saddle, and that the ruinous state of the right knee was equally eloquent of the concussions attendant on that person's hasty, frequently causeless, and invariably ill-conceived descents. One large bruise on the shin is even more characteristic of the 'prentice cyclist, for upon every one of them waits the jest of the unexpected treadle. You try at least to walk your machine in an easy manner, and whack!—you are rubbing your shin. So out of innocence we ripen. *Two* bruises on that place mark a certain want of aptitude in learning, such as one might expect in a person unused to muscular exercise. Blisters on the hands are eloquent of the nervous clutch of the wavering rider. And so forth, until Sherlock is presently explaining, by the help of the minor injuries, that the machine ridden is an old-fashioned affair with a fork instead of the diamond frame, a cushioned tire, well worn on the hind wheel, and a gross weight all on of perhaps three-and-forty pounds.

The revelation is made. Behind the decorous figure of the attentive shopman that I had the honour of showing you at first, rises a vision of a nightly struggle, of two dark figures and a machine in a dark road,—the road, to be explicit, from Roehampton to Putney Hill,—and with this vision is the sound

THE WHEELS OF CHANCE

of a heel spurning the gravel, a gasping and grunting, a shouting of "Steer, man, steer!" a wavering unsteady flight, a spasmodic turning of the missile edifice of man and machine, and a collapse. Then you descry dimly through the dusk the central figure of this story sitting by the roadside and rubbing his leg at some new place, and his friend, sympathetic (but by no means depressed), repairing the displacement of the handle-bar.

Thus even in a shop assistant does the warmth of manhood assert itself, and drive him against all the conditions of his calling, against the counsels of prudence and the restrictions of his means, to seek the wholesome delights of exertion and danger and pain. And our first examination of the draper reveals beneath his draperies—the man! To which initial fact (among others) we shall come again in the end.

II

BUT enough of these revelations. The central figure of our story is now going along behind the counter, a draper indeed, with your purchases in his arms, to the warehouse, where the various articles you have selected will presently be packed by the senior porter and sent to you. Returning thence to his particular place, he lays hands on a folded piece of gingham, and gripping the corners of the folds in his hands, begins to straighten them punctiliously. Near him is an apprentice, apprenticed to the same high calling of draper's assistant, a ruddy, red-haired lad in a very short tailless black coat and a very high collar, who is

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deliberately unfolding and refolding some patterns of cretonne. By twenty-one he too may hope to be a full-blown assistant, even as Mr. Hoopdriver. Prints depend from the brass rails above them, behind are fixtures full of white packages containing, as inscriptions testify, *Lino*, *Hd Bk*, and *Mull*. You might imagine to see them that the two were both intent upon nothing but smoothness of textile and rectitude of fold. But to tell the truth, neither is thinking of the mechanical duties in hand. The assistant is dreaming of the delicious time—only four hours off now—when he will resume the tale of his bruises and abrasions. The apprentice is nearer the long long thoughts of boyhood, and his imagination rides *cap-à-pie* through the chambers of his brain, seeking some knightly quest in honour of that Fair Lady, the last but one of the girl apprentices to the dress-making upstairs. He inclines rather to street fighting against revolutionaries—because then she could see him from the window.

Jerking them back to the present comes the puffy little shop-walker, with a paper in his hand. The apprentice becomes extremely active. The shop-walker eyes the goods in hand. "Hoopdriver," he says, "how's that line of g-sez-x gingham?"

Hoopdriver returns from an imaginary triumph over the uncertainties of dismounting. "They're going fairly well, sir. But the larger checks seem hanging."

The shop-walker brings up parallel to the counter. "Any particular time when you want your holidays?" he asks.

THE WHEELS OF CHANCE

Hoopdriver pulls at his skimpy moustache. "No—Don't want them too late, sir, of course."

"How about this day week?"

Hoopdriver becomes rigidly meditative, gripping the corners of the gingham folds in his hands. His face is eloquent of conflicting considerations. Can he learn it in a week? That's the question. Otherwise Briggs will get next week, and he will have to wait until September—when the weather is often uncertain. He is naturally of a sanguine disposition. All drapers have to be, or else they could never have the faith they show in the beauty, washability, and unfading excellence of the goods they sell you. The decision comes at last. "That'll do me very well," said Mr. Hoopdriver, terminating the pause.

The die is cast.

The shop-walker makes a note of it and goes on to Briggs in the "dresses," the next in the strict scale of precedence of the Drapery Emporium. Mr. Hoopdriver in alternating spasms anon straightens his gingham and anon becomes meditative, with his tongue in the hollow of his decaying wisdom tooth.

III

AT supper that night, holiday talk held undisputed sway. Mr. Pritchard spoke of "Scotland," Miss Isaacs clamoured of Bettws-y-Coed, Mr. Judson displayed a proprietary interest in the Norfolk Broads. "I?" said Hoopdriver when the question came to him. "Why, cycling, of course."

"You're never going to ride that dreadful machine

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTER

of yours, day after day?" said Miss Howe of the Costume Department.

"I am," said Hoopdriver as calmly as possible, pulling at the insufficient moustache. "I'm going for a Cycling Tour. Along the South Coast."

"Well, all I hope, Mr. Hoopdriver, is that you'll get fine weather," said Miss Howe. "And not come any nasty croppers."

"And done forget some tinscher of arnica in yer bag," said the junior apprentice in the very high collar. (He had witnessed one of the lessons at the top of Putney Hill.)

"You stow it," said Mr. Hoopdriver, looking hard and threateningly at the junior apprentice, and suddenly adding in a tone of bitter contempt,—*"Jam-pot."*

"I'm getting fairly safe upon it now," he told Miss Howe.

At other times Hoopdriver might have further resented the satirical efforts of the apprentice, but his mind was too full of the projected Tour to admit any petty delicacies of dignity. He left the supper table early, so that he might put in a good hour at the desperate gymnastics up the Roehampton Road before it would be time to come back for locking up. When the gas was turned off for the night he was sitting on the edge of his bed, rubbing arnica into his knee—a new and very big place—and studying a Road Map of the South of England. Briggs of the "dresses," who shared the room with him, was sitting up in bed and trying to smoke in the dark. Briggs had never been on a cycle in his life, but he felt Hoopdriver's

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inexperience and offered such advice as occurred to him.

“Have the machine thoroughly well oiled,” said Briggs, “carry one or two lemons with you, don’t tear yourself to death the first day, and sit upright. Never lose control of the machine, and always sound the bell on every possible opportunity. You mind those things, and nothing very much can’t happen to you, Hoopdriver—you take my word.”

He would lapse into silence for a minute, save perhaps for a curse or so at his pipe, and then break out with an entirely different set of tips.

“Avoid running over dogs, Hoopdriver, whatever you do. It’s one of the worst things you can do to run over a dog. Never let the machine buckle—there was a man killed only the other day through his wheel buckling—don’t scorch, don’t ride on the footpath, keep your own side of the road, and if you see a tram-line, go round the corner at once, and hurry off into the next county—and always light up before dark. You mind just a few little things like that, Hoopdriver, and nothing much can’t happen to you—you take my word.”

“Right you are!” said Hoopdriver. “Good-night, old man.”

“Good-night,” said Briggs, and there was silence for a space, save for the succulent respiration of the pipe. Hoopdriver rode off into Dreamland on his machine, and was scarcely there before he was pitched back into the world of sense again. Something—what was it?

“Never oil the steering. It’s fatal,” a voice that

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTER

came from round a fitful glow of light, was saying.
“And clean the chain daily with black-lead. You
mind just a few little things like that——”

“Lord *love* us!” said Hoopdriver, and pulled the
bedclothes over his ears.

THE RIDING FORTH OF MR. HOOPDRIVER

IV

ONLY those who toil six long days out of the seven, and all the year round, save for one brief glorious fortnight or ten days in the summer time, know the exquisite sensations of the First Holiday Morning. All the dreary, uninteresting routine drops from you suddenly, your chains fall about your feet. All at once you are Lord of yourself, Lord of every hour in the long, vacant day; you may go where you please, call none Sir or Madam, have a lapel free of pins, doff your black morning coat, and wear the colour of your heart and be a Man. You grudge sleep, you grudge eating and drinking even, their intrusion on those exquisite moments. There will be no more rising before breakfast in casual old clothing, to go dusting and getting ready in a cheerless, shutter-darkened, wrapped-up shop, no more imperious cries of, "Forward, Hoopdriver," no more hasty meals and weary attendance on fitful old women, for ten blessed days. The first morning is by far the most glorious, for you hold your whole fortune in your hands. Thereafter, every night comes a pang, a spectre, that will not be exorcised—the premonition of the return. The shadow of going back, of being put in the cage again for another twelve months, lies blacker and blacker across the sunlight. But on the first morning of the ten the

MR. HOOPDRIVER RIDES FORTH

holiday has no past, and ten days seems as good as infinity.

And it was fine, full of a promise of glorious days, a deep blue sky with dazzling piles of white cloud here and there, as though celestial haymakers had been piling the swathes of last night's clouds into cocks for a coming cartage. There were thrushes in the Richmond Road, and a lark on Putney Heath. The freshness of dew was in the air; dew or the relics of an overnight shower glittered on the leaves and grass. Hoopdriver had breakfasted early by Mrs. Gunn's complaisance. He wheeled his machine up Putney Hill, and his heart sang within him. Half-way up, a dissipated-looking black cat rushed home across the road and vanished under a gate. All the big red-brick houses behind the variegated shrubs and trees had their blinds down still, and he would not have changed places with a soul in any one of them for a hundred pounds.

He had on his new brown cycling suit—a handsome Norfolk jacket thing for 30/—and his legs—those martyr legs—were more than consoled for all they had endured by thick chequered stockings, “thin in the foot, thick in the leg.” A neat packet of American cloth behind the saddle contained his change of raiment, and the bell and the handle-bar and the hubs and lamp, albeit a trifle freckled by wear, glittered blindingly in the rising sunlight. And at the top of the hill, after only one unsuccessful attempt, which somehow terminated on the green, Hoopdriver mounted, and with a stately and cautious restraint in his pace, and a dignified curvature of

THE WHEELS OF CHANCE

path, began his great Cycling Tour along the Southern Coast.

There is only one phrase to describe his course at this stage, and that is—voluptuous curves. He did not ride fast, he did not ride straight, an exacting critic might say he did not ride well—but he rode generously, opulently, using the whole road and even nibbling at the footpath. The excitement never flagged. So far he had never passed or been passed by anything, but as yet the day was young and the road was clear. He doubted his steering so much that, for the present, he had resolved to dismount at the approach of anything else upon wheels. The shadows of the trees lay very long and blue across the road, the morning sunlight was like amber fire. At the cross-roads at the top of West Hill, where the cattle trough stands, he turned towards Kingston and set himself to scale the little bit of ascent. An early heath-keeper, in his velveteen jacket, marvelled at his efforts. And while he yet struggled, the head of a carter rose over the brow.

At the sight of him Mr. Hoopdriver, according to his previous determination, resolved to dismount. He tightened the brake, and the machine stopped dead. He was trying to think what he did with his right leg whilst getting off. He gripped the handles and released the brake, standing on the left pedal and waving his right foot in the air. Then—these things take so long in the telling—he found the machine was falling over to the right. While he was deciding upon a plan of action, gravitation appears to have been busy. He was still irresolute when he

MR. HOOPDRIVER RIDES FORTH

found the machine on the ground, himself kneeling upon it, and a vague feeling in his mind that again Providence had dealt harshly with his shin. This happened when he was just level with the heath-keeper. The man in the approaching cart stood up to see the ruins better.

“*That ain’t the way to get off,*” said the heath-keeper.

Mr. Hoopdriver picked up the machine. The handle was twisted askew again. He said something under his breath. He would have to unscrew the beastly thing.

“*That ain’t the way to get off,*” repeated the heath-keeper, after a silence.

“*I know that,*” said Mr. Hoopdriver, testily, determined to overlook the new specimen on his shin at any cost. He unbuckled the wallet behind the saddle, to get out a screw hammer.

“If you know it ain’t the way to get off—whadyer do it for?” said the heath-keeper, in a tone of friendly controversy.

Mr. Hoopdriver got out his screw hammer and went to the handle. He was annoyed. “That’s my business, I suppose,” he said, fumbling with the screw. The unusual exertion had made his hands shake frightfully.

The heath-keeper became meditative, and twisted his stick in his hands behind his back. “You’ve broken yer ’andle, ain’t yer?” he said presently. Just then the screw hammer slipped off the nut. Mr. Hoopdriver used a nasty, low word.

“They’re trying things, them bicycles,” said the

THE WHEELS OF CHANCE

heath-keeper, charitably. "Very trying." Mr. Hoopdriver gave the nut a vicious turn and suddenly stood up—he was holding the front wheel between his knees. "I wish," said he, with a catch in his voice, "I wish you'd leave off staring at me." Then with the air of one who has delivered an ultimatum, he began replacing the screw hammer in the wallet.

The heath-keeper never moved. Possibly he raised his eyebrows, and certainly he stared harder than he did before. "You're pretty unsociable," he said slowly, as Mr. Hoopdriver seized the handles and stood ready to mount as soon as the cart had passed.

The indignation gathered slowly but surely. "Why don't you ride on a private road of your own if no one ain't to speak to you?" asked the heath-keeper, perceiving more and more clearly the bearing of the matter. "Can't no one make a passin' remark to you, Touchy? Ain't I good enough to speak to you? Been struck wooden all of a sudden?"

Mr. Hoopdriver stared into the Immensity of the Future. He was rigid with emotion. It was like abusing the Lions in Trafalgar Square. But the heath-keeper felt his honour was at stake.

"Don't you make no remarks to 'im," said the keeper as the carter came up broadside to them. "'E's a bloomin' Dook, 'e is. 'E don't converse with no one under a earl. 'E's off to Windsor, 'e is; that's why 'e's stickin' his be'ind out so haughty. Pride! Why, 'e's got so much of it, 'e has to carry some of it in that there bundle there, for fear 'e'd bust if 'e didn't ease hisself a bit—'E——"

MR. HOOPDRIVER RIDES FORTH

But Mr. Hoopdriver heard no more. He was hopping vigorously along the road, in a spasmodic attempt to remount. He missed the treadle once and swore viciously, to the keeper's immense delight. "Nar! Nar!" said the heath-keeper.

In another moment Mr. Hoopdriver was up, and after one terrific lurch of the machine, the heath-keeper dropped out of earshot.

Mr. Hoopdriver would have liked to look back at his enemy, but he usually twisted round and upset if he tried that. He had to imagine the indignant heath-keeper telling the carter all about it. He tried to infuse as much disdain as possible into his retreating aspect.

He drove on his sinuous way down the dip by the new mere and up the little rise to the crest of the hill that drops into Kingston Vale; and so remarkable is the psychology of cycling, that he rode all the straighter and easier because the emotions the heath-keeper had aroused relieved his mind of the constant expectation of collapse that had previously unnerved him. To ride a bicycle properly is very like a love affair; chiefly it is a matter of faith. Believe you do it, and the thing is done; doubt, and, for the life of you, you cannot.

Now you may perhaps imagine that as he rode on, his feelings towards the heath-keeper were either vindictive or remorseful,—vindictive for the aggravation or remorseful for his own injudicious display of ill temper. As a matter of fact, they were nothing of the sort. A sudden, a wonderful gratitude possessed him. The Glory of the Holidays had resumed

THE WHEELS OF CHANCE

its sway with a sudden accession of splendour. At the crest of the hill he put his feet upon the foot-rests, and now riding moderately straight, went, with a palpitating brake, down that excellent descent. A new delight was in his eyes, quite over and above the pleasure of rushing through the keen sweet, morning air. He reached out his thumb and twanged his bell out of sheer happiness.

“ ‘He’s a bloomin’ Dook—he is!’ ” said Mr. Hoopdriver to himself, in a soft undertone, as he went soaring down the hill, and again, “ ‘He’s a bloomin’ Dook!’ ” He opened his mouth in a silent laugh. It was having a decent cut did it. His social superiority had been so evident that even a man like that noticed it. No more Manchester Department for ten days! Out of Manchester, a Man. The draper Hoopdriver, the Hand, had vanished from existence. Instead was a gentleman, a man of pleasure, with a five-pound note, two sovereigns, and some silver at various convenient points of his person. At any rate as good as a Dook, if not precisely in the peerage. Involuntarily at the thought of his funds Hoopdriver’s right hand left the handle and sought his breast pocket, to be immediately recalled by a violent swoop of the machine towards the cemetery. Whir-roo! Just missed that half-brick! Mischievous brutes there were in the world to put such a thing in the road. Some blooming ’Arry or other! Ought to prosecute a few of these roughs, and the rest would know better. That must be the buckle of the wallet rattling on the mud-guard. How cheerfully the wheels buzzed.

MR. HOOPDRIVER RIDES FORTH

The cemetery was very silent and peaceful, but the Vale was waking; and the windows rattled and squeaked up, and a white dog came out of one of the houses and yelped at him. He got off, rather breathless, at the foot of Kingston Hill, and pushed up. Half-way up, an early milk chariot rattled by him; two dirty men with bundles came hurrying down. Hoopdriver felt sure they were burglars, carrying home the swag.

It was up Kingston Hill that he first noticed a peculiar feeling, a slight tightness at his knees; but he noticed, too, at the top that he rode straighter than he did before. The pleasure of riding straight blotted out these first intimations of fatigue. A man on horseback appeared; Hoopdriver, in a tumult of soul at his own temerity, passed him. Then down the hill into Kingston, with the screw hammer, behind in the wallet, rattling against the oil can. He passed, without misadventure, a fruiterer's van and a sluggish cartload of bricks. And in Kingston Hoopdriver, with the most exquisite sensations, saw the shutters half removed from a draper's shop, and two yawning youths, in dusty old black jackets and with dirty white comforters about their necks, clearing up the planks and boxes and wrappers in the window, preparatory to dressing it out. Even so had Hoopdriver been on the previous day. But now, was he not a bloomin' Dook, palpably in the sight of common men? Then round the corner to the right—bell banged furiously—and so along the road to Surbiton.

Whoop for Freedom and Adventure! Every now

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and then a house with an expression of sleepy surprise would open its eye as he passed, and to the right of him for a mile or so the weltering Thames flashed and glittered. Talk of your *joie de vivre!* Albeit with a certain cramping sensation about the knees and calves slowly forcing itself upon his attention.

THE SHAMEFUL EPISODE OF THE YOUNG LADY IN GREY

V

Now you must understand that Mr. Hoopdriver was not one of your fast young men. If he had been King Lemuel, he could not have profited more by his mother's instructions. He regarded the feminine sex as something to bow to and smirk at from a safe distance. Years of the intimate remoteness of a counter leave their mark upon a man. It was an adventure for him to take one of the Young Ladies of the establishment to church on a Sunday. Few modern young men could less have merited the epithet "Dorg." But I have thought at times that his machine may have had something of the blade in its metal. Decidedly it was a machine with a past. Mr. Hoopdriver had bought it second-hand from Hare's in Putney, and Hare said it had had several owners. Second-hand was scarcely the word for it, and Hare was mildly puzzled that he should be selling such an antiquity. He said it was perfectly sound, if a little old-fashioned, but he was absolutely silent about its moral character. It may even have begun its career with a poet, say, in his glorious youth. It may have been the bicycle of a Really Bad Man. No one who has ever ridden a cycle of any kind but will witness that the things are unaccountably prone to pick up bad habits—and keep them.

It is undeniable that it became convulsed with the

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most violent emotions directly the Young Lady in Grey appeared. It began an absolutely unprecedented Wabble—unprecedented so far as Hoopdriver's experience went. It "showed off"—the most decadent sinuosity. It left a track like one of Beardsley's feathers. He suddenly realised, too, that his cap was loose on his head and his breath a mere remnant.

The Young Lady in Grey was also riding a bicycle. She was dressed in a beautiful bluish-grey, and the sun behind her drew her outline in gold and left the rest in shadow. Hoopdriver was dimly aware that she was young, rather slender, dark, and with a bright colour and bright eyes. Strange doubts possessed him as to the nature of her nether costume. He had heard of such things of course. French, perhaps. Her handles glittered; a jet of sunlight splashed off her bell blindingly. She was approaching the high road along an affluent from the villas of Surbiton. The roads converged slantingly. She was travelling at about the same pace as Mr. Hoopdriver. The appearances pointed to a meeting at the fork of the roads.

Hoopdriver was seized with a horrible conflict of doubts. By contrast with her he rode disgracefully. Had he not better get off at once and pretend something was wrong with his treadle? Yet even the end of getting off was an uncertainty. That last occasion on Putney Heath! On the other hand, what would happen if he kept on? To go very slowly seemed the abnegation of his manhood. To crawl after a mere schoolgirl! Besides, she was not riding

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very fast. On the other hand, to thrust himself in front of her, consuming the road in his tendril-like advance, seemed an incivility—greed. He would leave her such a very little. His business training made him prone to bow and step aside. If only one could take one's hands off the handles, one might pass with a silent elevation of the hat, of course. But even that was a little suggestive of a funeral.

Meanwhile the roads converged. She was looking at him. She was flushed, a little thin, and had very bright eyes. Her red lips fell apart. She may have been riding hard, but it looked uncommonly like a faint smile. And the things were—yes!—*rational*! Suddenly an impulse to bolt from the situation became clamorous. Mr. Hoopdriver pedalled convulsively, intending to pass her. He jerked against some tin thing on the road, and it flew up between front wheel and mud-guard. He twisted round towards her. Had the machine a devil?

At that supreme moment it came across him that he would have been wiser to dismount. He gave a frantic “whoop” and tried to get round, then, as he seemed falling over, he pulled the handles straight again and to the left by an instinctive motion, and shot behind her hind wheel, missing her by a hair's breadth. The pavement curb awaited him. He tried to recover, and found himself jumped up on the pavement and riding squarely at a neat wooden paling. He struck this with a terrific impact and shot forward off his saddle into a clumsy entanglement. Then he began to tumble over sideways, and completed the figure in a sitting position on the

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gravel, with his feet between the fork and the stay of the machine. The concussion on the gravel shook his entire being. He remained in that position, wishing that he had broken his neck, wishing even more heartily that he had never been born. The glory of life had departed. Bloomin' Dook, indeed! These unwomanly women!

There was a soft whirr, the click of a brake, two footfalls, and the Young Lady in Grey stood holding her machine. She had turned round and come back to him. The warm sunlight now was on her face. "Are you hurt?" she said. She had a pretty, clear, girlish voice. She was really very young—quite a girl, in fact. And rode so well! It was a bitter draught.

Mr. Hoopdriver stood up at once. "Not a bit," he said, a little ruefully. He became painfully aware that large patches of gravel scarcely improve the appearance of a Norfolk suit. "I'm very sorry indeed——"

"It's my fault," she said, interrupting and so saving him on the very verge of calling her "Miss." (He knew "Miss" was wrong, but it was a deep-seated habit with him.) "I tried to pass you on the wrong side." Her face and eyes seemed all alive. "It's my place to be sorry."

"But it was my steering——"

"I ought to have seen you were a Novice"—with a touch of superiority. "But you rode so straight coming along there!"

She really was—dashed pretty. Mr. Hoopdriver's feelings passed the nadir. When he spoke again

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there was the faintest flavour of the aristocratic in his voice.

“It’s my first ride, as a matter of fact. But that’s no excuse for my ah! blundering——”

“Your finger’s bleeding,” she said, abruptly.

He saw his knuckle was barked. “I didn’t notice it,” he said, feeling manly.

“You don’t at first. Have you any sticking-plaster? If not——” She balanced her machine against herself. She had a little side pocket, and she whipped out a small packet of sticking-plaster with a pair of scissors in a sheath at the side, and cut off a generous portion. He had a wild impulse to ask her to stick it on for him. Controlled. “Thank you,” he said.

“Machine all right?” she asked, looking past him at the prostrate vehicle, her hands on her handle-bar. For the first time Hoopdriver did not feel proud of his machine.

He turned and began to pick up the fallen fabric. He looked over his shoulder, and she was gone, turned his head over the other shoulder down the road, and she was riding off. “*Orf!*” said Mr. Hoopdriver. “Well, I’m blowed!—Talk about Slap Up!” (His aristocratic refinement rarely adorned his speech in his private soliloquies.) His mind was whirling. One fact was clear. A most delightful and novel human being had flashed across his horizon and was going out of his life again. The Holiday madness was in his blood. She looked round!

At that he rushed his machine into the road, and began a hasty ascent. Unsuccessful. Try again.

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Confound it, will he *never* be able to get up on the thing again? She will be round the corner in a minute. Once more. Ah! Pedal! Wobble! No! Right this time! He gripped the handles and put his head down. He would overtake her.

The situation was primordial. The Man beneath prevailed for a moment over the civilised superstructure, the Draper. He pushed at the pedals with archaic violence. So Palæolithic man may have ridden his simple bicycle of chipped flint in pursuit of his exogamous affinity. She vanished round the corner. His effort was Titanic. What should he say when he overtook her? That scarcely disturbed him at first. How fine she had looked, flushed with the exertion of riding, breathing a little fast, but elastic and active! Talk about your ladylike, home-keeping girls with complexions like cold veal! But what should he say to her? That was a bother. And he could not lift his cap without risking a repetition of his previous ignominy. She was a real Young Lady. No mistake about that! None of your blooming shop girls. (There is no greater contempt in the world than that of shop men for shop girls, unless it be that of shop girls for shop men.) Phew! This was work. A certain numbness came and went at his knees.

“May I ask to whom I am indebted?” he panted to himself, trying it over. That might do. Lucky he had a card case! A hundred a shilling—while you wait. He was getting winded. The road was certainly a bit uphill. He turned the corner and saw a long stretch of road, and a grey dress vanishing.

THE YOUNG LADY IN GREY

He set his teeth. Had he gained on her at all? "Monkey on a gridiron!" yelled a small boy. Hoopdriver redoubled his efforts. His breath became audible, his steering unsteady, his pedalling positively ferocious. A drop of perspiration ran into his eye, irritant as acid. The road really was uphill beyond dispute. All his physiology began to cry out at him. A last tremendous effort brought him to the corner and showed yet another extent of shady roadway, empty save for a baker's van. His front wheel suddenly shrieked aloud. "Oh Lord!" said Hoopdriver, relaxing.

Anyhow she was not in sight. He got off unsteadily, and for a moment his legs felt like wisps of cotton. He balanced his machine against the grassy edge of the path and sat down panting. His hands were gnarled with swollen veins and shaking palpably, his breath came viscid.

"I'm hardly in training yet," he remarked. His legs had gone leaden. "I don't feel as though I'd had a mouthful of breakfast." Presently he slapped his side pocket and produced therefrom a brand-new cigarette case and a packet of Vansittart's Red Herring cigarettes. He filled the case. Then his eye fell with a sudden approval on the ornamental chequering of his new stockings. The expression in his eyes faded slowly to abstract meditation.

"She *was* a stunning girl," he said. "I wonder if I shall ever set eyes on her again. And she knew how to ride, too! Wonder what she thought of me."

The phrase "bloomin' Dook" floated into his mind with a certain flavour of comfort.

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He lit a cigarette, and sat smoking and meditating. He did not even look up when vehicles passed. It was perhaps ten minutes before he roused himself. "What rot it is! What's the good of thinking such things," he said. "I'm only a blessed draper's assistant." (To be exact, he did not say blessed. The service of a shop may polish a man's exterior ways, but the 'prentices' dormitory is an indifferent school for either manners or morals.) He stood up and began wheeling his machine towards Esher. It was going to be a beautiful day, and the hedges and trees and the open country were all glorious to his town-tired eyes. But it was a little different from the elation of his start.

"Look at the gentleman wizzer bicitle," said a nursemaid on the path to a personage in a perambulator. That healed him a little. "'Gentleman wizzer bicitle,'—'bloomin' Dook'—I can't look so very seedy," he said to himself.

"I *wonder*—I should just like to know——"

There was something very comforting in the track of *her* pneumatic running straight and steady along the road before him. It must be hers. No other pneumatic had been along the road that morning. It was just possible, of course, that he might see her once more—coming back. Should he try and say something smart? He speculated what manner of girl she might be. Probably she was one of these here New Women. He had a persuasion the cult had been maligned. Anyhow she was a Lady. And rich people, too! Her machine couldn't have cost much under twenty pounds. His mind came round

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and dwelt some time on her visible self. Rational dress didn't look a bit unwomanly. However, he disdained to be one of your fortune-hunters. Then his thoughts drove off at a tangent. He would certainly have to get something to eat at the next public house.

ON THE ROAD TO RIPLEY

VI

IN the fulness of time, Mr. Hoopdriver drew near the Marquis of Granby at Esher, and as he came under the railway arch and saw the inn in front of him, he mounted his machine again and rode bravely up to the doorway. Burton and biscuits and cheese he had, which, indeed, is Burton in its proper company; and as he was eating there came a middle-aged man in a drab cycling suit, very red and moist and angry in the face, and asked bitterly for a lemon squash. And he sat down upon the seat in the bar and mopped his face. But scarcely had he sat down before he got up again and stared out of the doorway.

“Damn!” said he. Then, “Damned Fool!”

“Eigh?” said Mr. Hoopdriver, looking round suddenly with a piece of cheese in his cheek.

The man in drab faced him. “I called myself a Damned Fool, sir. Have you any objection?”

“Oh!—None. None,” said Mr. Hoopdriver. “I thought you spoke to me. I didn’t hear what you said.”

“To have a contemplative disposition and an energetic temperament, sir, is hell. Hell, I tell you. A contemplative disposition and a phlegmatic temperament, all very well. But energy and philosophy——!”

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Mr. Hoopdriver looked as intelligent as he could, but said nothing.

“There’s no hurry, sir, none whatever. I came out for exercise, gentle exercise, and to notice the scenery and to botanise. And no sooner do I get on the accursed machine, than off I go hammer and tongs; I never look to right or left, never notice a flower, never see a view, get hot, juicy, red,—like a grilled chop. Here I am, sir. Come from Guildford in something under the hour. *Why, sir?*”

Mr. Hoopdriver shook his head.

“Because I’m a damned fool, sir. Because I’ve reservoirs and reservoirs of muscular energy, and one or other of them is always leaking. It’s a most interesting road, birds and trees, I’ve no doubt, and way-side flowers, and there’s nothing I should enjoy more than watching them. But I can’t. Get me on that machine, and I have to go. Get me on anything, and I have to go. And I don’t want to go a bit. *Why* should a man rush about like a rocket, all pace and fizzle? *Why?* It makes me furious. I can assure you, sir, I go scorching along the road, and cursing aloud at myself for doing it. A quiet, dignified, philosophical man, that’s what I am—at bottom; and here I am dancing with rage and swearing like a drunken tinker at a perfect stranger——

“But my day’s wasted. I’ve lost all that country road, and now I’m on the fringe of London. And I might have loitered all the morning! Ugh! Thank Heaven, sir, you have not the irritable temperament, that you are not goaded to madness by your endogenous sneers, by the eternal wrangling of an

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uncomfortable soul and body. I tell you, I lead a cat and dog life—But what *is* the use of talking?—It's all of a piece!"

He tossed his head with unspeakable self-disgust, pitched the lemon squash into his mouth, paid for it, and without any further remark strode to the door. Mr. Hoopdriver was still wondering what to say when his interlocutor vanished. There was a noise of a foot spurning the gravel, and when Mr. Hoopdriver reached the doorway, the man in drab was a score of yards Londonward. He had already gathered pace. He pedalled with ill-suppressed anger, and his head was going down. In another moment he flew swiftly out of sight under the railway arch, and Mr. Hoopdriver saw him no more.

VII

AFTER this whirlwind Mr. Hoopdriver paid his reckoning and—being now a little rested about the muscles of the knees—resumed his saddle and rode on in the direction of Ripley, along an excellent but undulating road. He was pleased to find his command over his machine already sensibly increased. He set himself little exercises as he went along and performed them with variable success. There was, for instance, steering in between a couple of stones, say a foot apart, a deed of little difficulty as far as the front wheel is concerned. But the back wheel, not being under the sway of the human eye, is apt to take a vicious jump over the obstacle, which sends a violent concussion all along the spine to the skull, and

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will even jerk a loosely fastened hat over the eyes, and so lead to much confusion. And again, there was taking the hand or hands off the handle-bar, a thing simple in itself, but complex in its consequences. This particularly was a feat Mr. Hoopdriver desired to do, for several divergent reasons; but at present it led to convulsive balancings and novel and inelegant modes of dismounting.

The human nose is, at its best, a needless excrescence. There are those who consider it ornamental, and would regard a face deprived of its assistance with pity or derision; but it is doubtful whether our esteem is dictated so much by a sense of its absolute beauty as by the vitiating effect of a universally prevalent fashion. In the case of bicycle students, as in the young of both sexes, its inutility is aggravated by its persistent annoyance—it requires constant attention. Until one can ride with one hand, and search for, secure, and use a pocket handkerchief with the other, cycling is necessarily a constant series of descents. Nothing can be further from the author's ambition than a wanton realism, but Mr. Hoopdriver's nose is a plain and salient fact, and face it we must. And in addition to this inconvenience, there are flies. Until the cyclist can steer with one hand, his face is given over to Beelzebub. Contemplative flies stroll over it, and trifle absently with its most sensitive surfaces. The only way to dislodge them is to shake the head forcibly and to writhe one's features violently. This is not only a lengthy and frequently ineffectual method, but one exceedingly terrifying to foot passengers. And

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again, sometimes the beginner rides for a space with one eye closed by perspiration, giving him a waggish air foreign to his mood and ill calculated to overawe the impertinent. However, you will appreciate now the motive of Mr. Hoopdriver's experiments. He presently attained sufficient dexterity to slap himself smartly and violently in the face with his right hand, without certainly overturning the machine; but his pocket handkerchief might have been in California for any good it was to him while he was in the saddle.

Yet you must not think that because Mr. Hoopdriver was a little uncomfortable, he was unhappy in the slightest degree. In the background of his consciousness was the sense that about this time Briggs would be half-way through his window dressing, and Gosling, the apprentice, busy, with a chair turned down over the counter and his ears very red, trying to roll a piece of huckaback—only those who have rolled pieces of huckaback know quite how detestable huckaback is to roll—and the shop would be dusty and, perhaps, the governor about and snappy. And here was quiet and greenery, and one mucked about as the desire took one, without a soul to see; and here was no wailing of "Sayn," no folding of remnants, no voice to shout, "Hoopdriver, forward!" And once he almost ran over something wonderful, a little, low, red beast with a yellowish tail, that went rushing across the road before him. It was the first weasel he had ever seen in his cockney life. There were miles of this, scores of miles of this before him, pine-wood and oak forest, purple, heathery moorland

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and grassy down, lush meadows where shining rivers wound their lazy way, villages with square-towered, flint churches, and rambling, cheap, and hearty inns, clean white country towns, long downhill stretches where one might ride at one's ease (overlooking a jolt or so), and far away, at the end of it all,—the sea.

What mattered a fly or so in the dawn of these delights? Perhaps he had been dashed a minute by the shameful episode of the Young Lady in Grey, and perhaps the memory of it was making itself a lair in a corner of his brain from which it could distress him in the retrospect by suggesting that he looked like a fool; but for the present that trouble was altogether in abeyance. The man in drab—evidently a swell—had spoken to him as his equal, and the knees of his brown suit and the chequered stockings were ever before his eyes. (Or rather, you could see the stockings by carrying the head a little to one side.) And to feel little by little his mastery over this delightful, treacherous machine growing and growing!—Every half-mile or so his knees reasserted themselves, and he dismounted and sat awhile by the roadside.

It was at a charming rustic place between Esher and Cobham, where a bridge crosses a stream, that Mr. Hoopdriver came across the other cyclist in brown. It is well to notice the fact here, although the interview was of the slightest, because it happened that subsequently Hoopdriver saw a great deal more of this other man in brown. The other cyclist in brown had a machine of dazzling newness, and a punctured pneumatic lay across his knees. He was

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a man of thirty or more, with a whitish face, an aquiline nose, a lank flaxen moustache, and very fair hair, and he scowled at the job before him. At the sight of him Mr. Hoopdriver pulled himself together, and rode by with the air of one born to the wheel. "A splendid morning," said Mr. Hoopdriver, "and a fine surface."

"The morning and you and the surface be everlastingly damned!" said the other man in brown as Hoopdriver receded. Hoopdriver heard the mumble and did not distinguish the words, and he felt a pleasing sense of having duly asserted the wide sympathy that binds all cyclists together, of having behaved himself as becomes one of the brotherhood of the wheel. The other man in brown watched his receding aspect. "Greasy proletarian," said the other man in brown, feeling a prophetic dislike. "Got a suit of brown, the very picture of this. One would think his sole aim in life had been to caricature me. It's Fortune's way with me. Look at his insteps on the treadles! Why does Heaven make such men?"

And having lit a cigarette, the other man in brown returned to the business in hand.

Mr. Hoopdriver worked up the hill towards Cobham to a point that he felt sure was out of sight of the other man in brown, and then he dismounted and pushed his machine until the proximity of the village and a proper pride drove him into the saddle again.

ON THE ROAD TO RIPLEY

VIII

BEYOND Cobham came a delightful incident; delightful, that is, in its beginning if a trifle indeterminate in the retrospect. It was perhaps half-way between Cobham and Ripley. Mr. Hoopdriver dropped down a little hill where, unfenced from the road, fine mossy trees and bracken lay on either side; and looking up he saw an open country before him, covered with heather and set with pines, and a yellow road running across it, and half a mile away perhaps, a little grey figure by the wayside waving something white. "Never!" said Mr. Hoopdriver with his hands tightening on the handles.

He resumed the treadles, staring away before him, jolted over a stone, wobbled, recovered, and began riding faster at once, with his eyes ahead. "It can't be," said Hoopdriver.

He rode his straightest, and kept his pedals spinning, albeit a limp numbness had resumed possession of his legs. "It *can't* be," he repeated, feeling every moment more assured that it *was*. "Lord! I don't know even now," said Mr. Hoopdriver (legs awhirling), and then, "Blow my legs!"

But he kept on and drew nearer and nearer, breathing hard and gathering flies like a flypaper. In the valley he was hidden. Then the road began to rise, and the resistance of the pedals grew. As he crested the hill he saw her, not a hundred yards away from him. "It's her!" he said. "It's her—right enough. It's the suit's done it,"—which was truer even than Mr. Hoopdriver thought. But now she was

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not waving her handkerchief, she was not even looking at him. She was wheeling her machine slowly along the road towards him, and admiring the pretty wooded hills towards Weybridge. She might have been unaware of his existence for all the recognition he got.

For a moment horrible doubts troubled Mr. Hoopdriver. Had that handkerchief been a dream? Besides which he was deliquescent and scarlet, and felt so. It must be her coquetry—the handkerchief was indisputable. Should he ride up to her and get off, or get off and ride up to her? It was as well she didn't look, because he would certainly capsize if he lifted his cap. Perhaps that was her consideration. Even as he hesitated he was upon her. She must have heard his breathing. He gripped the brake. Steady! His right leg waved in the air, and he came down heavily and staggering, but erect. She turned her eyes upon him with admirable surprise.

Mr. Hoopdriver tried to smile pleasantly, hold up his machine, raise his cap, and bow gracefully. Indeed, he felt that he did as much. He was a man singularly devoid of the minutiae of self-consciousness, and he was quite unaware of a tail of damp hair lying across his forehead and just clearing his eyes, and of the general disorder of his coiffure. There was an interrogative pause.

“What can I have the pleasure—” began Mr. Hoopdriver, insinuatingly. “I mean” (remembering his emancipation and abruptly assuming his most aristocratic intonation), “can I be of any assistance to you?”

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The Young Lady in Grey bit her lower lip and said very prettily, "None, thank you." She glanced away from him and made as if she would proceed.

"Oh!" said Mr. Hoopdriver, taken aback and suddenly crestfallen again. It was so unexpected. He tried to grasp the situation. Was she coquetting? Or had he——?

"Excuse me, one minute," he said, as she began to wheel her machine again.

"Yes?" she said, stopping and staring a little, with the colour in her cheeks deepening.

"I should not have alighted if I had not—imagined that you—er, waved something white—" He paused.

She looked at him doubtfully. He *had* seen it! She decided that he was not an unredeemed rough taking advantage of a mistake, but an innocent soul meaning well while seeking happiness. "I *did* wave my handkerchief," she said. "I'm very sorry. I am expecting—a friend, a gentleman,"—she seemed to flush pink for a minute. "He is riding a bicycle and dressed in—in brown; and at a distance, you know——"

"Oh, quite!" said Mr. Hoopdriver, bearing up in manly fashion against his bitter disappointment. "Certainly."

"I'm Awfully sorry, you know. Troubling you to dismount, and all that."

"No trouble. 'Ssure you," said Mr. Hoopdriver, mechanically and bowing over his saddle as if it was a counter. Somehow he could not find it in his heart to tell her that the man was beyond there with a

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punctured pneumatic. He looked back along the road and tried to think of something else to say. But the gulf in the conversation widened rapidly and hopelessly. "There's nothing further," began Mr. Hoopdriver desperately, recurring to his stock of *clichés*.

"Nothing, thank you," she said decisively. And immediately, "This *is* the Ripley road?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Hoopdriver. "Ripley is about two miles from here. According to the mile-stones."

"Thank you," she said warmly. "Thank you so much. I felt sure there was no mistake. And I really am Awfully sorry——"

"Don't mention it," said Mr. Hoopdriver. "Don't mention it." He hesitated and gripped his handles to mount. "It's me," he said, "ought to be sorry." Should he say it? Was it an impertinence? Anyhow!—"Not being the other gentleman, you know."

He tried a quietly insinuating smile that he knew for a grin even as he smiled it; felt she disapproved—that she despised him, was overcome with shame at her expression, turned his back upon her, and began (very clumsily) to mount. He did so with a horrible swerve, and went pedalling off, riding very badly, as he was only too painfully aware. Nevertheless, thank Heaven for the mounting! He could not see her because it was so dangerous for him to look round, but he could imagine her indignant and pitiless. He felt an unspeakable idiot. One had to be so careful what one said to Young Ladies, and he'd gone and treated her just as though she was

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only a Larky Girl. It was unforgivable. He always *was* a fool. You could tell from her manner she didn't think him a gentleman. One glance, and she seemed to look clear through him and all his pretence. What rot it was venturing to speak to a girl like that! With her education she was bound to see through him at once. How nicely she spoke too! Nice clear-cut words! She made him feel what slush his own accent was. And that last silly remark. What was it—"Not being the other gentleman, you know!" No point in it. And "*gentleman!*" What *could* she be thinking of him?

But really the Young Lady in Grey had dismissed Hoopdriver from her thoughts almost before he had vanished round the corner. She had thought no ill of him. His manifest awe and admiration of her had given her not an atom of offence. But for her just now there were weightier things to think about, things that would affect all the rest of her life. She continued slowly walking her machine Londonward. Presently she stopped. "Oh! Why *doesn't* he come?" she said, and stamped her foot petulantly. Then, as if in answer, coming down the hill among the trees appeared the other man in brown, dismounted and wheeling his machine.

HOW MR. HOOPDRIVER WAS HAUNTED

IX

As Mr. Hoopdriver rode swaggering along the Ripley road, it came to him, with an unwarrantable sense of comfort, that he had seen the last of the Young Lady in Grey. But the ill-concealed blavery of the machine, the present machinery of Fate, the *deus ex machina*, so to speak, was against him. The bicycle, torn from this attractive young woman, grew heavier and heavier and continually more unsteady. It seemed a choice between stopping at Ripley or dying in the flower of his days. He went into the Unicorn, after propping his machine outside the door, and, as he cooled down and smoked his Red Herring cigarette while the cold meat was getting ready, he saw from the window the Young Lady in Grey and the other man in brown, entering Ripley.

They filled him with apprehension by looking at the house which sheltered him, but the sight of his bicycle, propped in a drunk and incapable attitude against the doorway, humping its rickety mud-guard and leering at them with its darkened lantern eye, drove them away—so it seemed to Mr. Hoopdriver—to the spacious swallow of the Golden Dragon. The young lady was riding very slowly, but the other man in brown had a bad puncture and was wheeling his machine. Mr. Hoopdriver noted his flaxen moustache, his aquiline nose, his rather bent shoulders, with a sudden, vivid dislike.

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The maid at the Unicorn is naturally a pleasant girl, but she is jaded by the incessant incidence of cyclists, and Hoopdriver's mind, even as he conversed with her in that cultivated voice of his—of the weather, of the distance from London, and of the excellence of the Ripley road—wandered to the incomparable freshness and brilliance of the Young Lady in Grey. As he sat at meat he kept turning his head to the window to see what signs there were of that person, but the face of the Golden Dragon displayed no appreciation of the delightful morsel it had swallowed. As an incidental consequence of this distraction, Mr. Hoopdriver was for a minute greatly inconvenienced by a mouthful of mustard. After he had called for his reckoning he went, his courage being high with meat and mustard, to the door, intending to stand with his legs wide apart and his hands deep in his pockets, and stare boldly across the road. But just then the other man in brown appeared in the gateway of the Golden Dragon yard—it is one of those delightful inns that date from the coaching days—wheeling his punctured machine. He was taking it to Flambeau's, the repairer's. He looked up and saw Hoopdriver, stared for a minute, and then scowled darkly.

But Hoopdriver remained stoutly in the doorway until the other man in brown had disappeared into Flambeau's. Then he glanced momentarily at the Golden Dragon, puckered his mouth into a whistle of unconcern, and proceeded to wheel his machine into the road until a sufficient margin for mounting was secured.

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Now at that time, I say, Hoopdriver was rather desirous than not of seeing no more of the Young Lady in Grey. The other man in brown he guessed was her brother, albeit that person was of a pallid fairness differing essentially from her rich colouring; and, besides, he felt he had made a hopeless fool of himself. But the afternoon was against him, intolerably hot, especially on the top of his head, and the virtue had gone out of his legs to digest his cold meat, and altogether his ride to Guildford was exceedingly intermittent. At times he would walk, at times lounge by the wayside, and every public house, in spite of Briggs and a sentiment of economy, meant a lemonade and a dash of bitter. (For that is the experience of all those who go on wheels, that drinking begets thirst even more than thirst begets drinking, until at last the man who yields becomes a hell unto himself, a hell in which the fire dieth not, and the thirst is not quenched.) Until a pennyworth of acrid green apples turned the current that threatened to carry him away. Ever and again a cycle, or a party of cyclists, would go by with glittering wheels and softly running chains, and on each occasion, to save his self-respect, Mr. Hoopdriver descended and feigned some trouble with his saddle. Each time he descended with less trepidation.

He did not reach Guildford until nearly four o'clock, and then he was so much exhausted that he decided to put up there for the night, at the Yellow Hammer Coffee Tavern. And after he had cooled for a space and refreshed himself with tea and bread and butter and jam,—the tea he drank noisily out of the

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saucer,—he went out to loiter away the rest of the afternoon. Guildford is an altogether charming old town, famous, so he learnt from a Guide Book, as the scene of Master Tupper's great historical novel of Stephen Langton, and it has a delightful castle, all set about with geraniums and brass plates commemorating the gentlemen who put them up, and its Guildhall is a Tudor building, very pleasant to see, and in the afternoon the shops are busy and the people going to and fro make the pavements look bright and prosperous. It was nice to peep in the windows and see the heads of the men and girls in the drapers' shops, busy as busy, serving away. The High Street runs down at an angle of seventy degrees to the horizon (so it seemed to Mr. Hoopdriver, whose feeling for gradients was unnaturally exalted), and it brought his heart into his mouth to see a cyclist ride down it, like a fly crawling down a window pane. The man hadn't even a brake. He visited the castle early in the evening and paid his twopence to ascend the Keep.

At the top, from the cage, he looked over the clustering red roofs of the town and the tower of the church, and then going to the southern side sat down and lit a Red Herring cigarette, and stared away south over the old bramble-bearing, fern-beset ruin at the waves of blue upland that rose, one behind another, across the Weald to the lazy altitudes of Hindhead and Butser. His pale grey eyes were full of complacency and pleasurable anticipation. Tomorrow he would go riding across that wide valley.

He did not notice any one else had come up the

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Keep after him until he heard a soft voice behind him saying: "Well, *Miss Beaumont*, here's the view." Something in the accent pointed to a jest in the name.

"It's a dear old town, brother George," answered another voice that sounded familiar enough, and turning his head, Mr. Hoopdriver saw the other man in brown and the Young Lady in Grey, with their backs towards him. She turned her smiling profile towards Hoopdriver. "Only, you know, brothers don't call their sisters——"

She glanced over her shoulder and saw Hoopdriver. "Damn!" said the other man in brown quite audibly, starting as he followed her glance.

Mr. Hoopdriver, with a fine air of indifference, resumed the Weald. "Beautiful old town, isn't it?" said the other man in brown, after a quite perceptible pause.

"Isn't it?" said the Young Lady in Grey.

Another pause began.

"Can't get alone anywhere," said the other man in brown, looking round.

Then Mr. Hoopdriver perceived clearly that he was in the way, and decided to retreat. It was just his luck of course that he should stumble at the head of the steps and vanish with indignity. This was the third time that he'd seen *him*, and the fourth time *her*. And of course he was too big a fat-head to raise his cap to her! He thought of that at the foot of the Keep. Apparently they aimed at the South Coast just as he did. He'd get up betimes the next day and hurry off to avoid her—them, that is. It never occurred to Mr. Hoopdriver that Miss

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Beaumont and her brother might do exactly the same thing, and that evening, at least, the oddity of a brother calling his sister "Miss Beaumont" did not recur to him. He was much too preoccupied with an analysis of his own share of these encounters. He found it hard to be altogether satisfied about the figure he had cut, revise his memories as he would.

Once more quite unintentionally he stumbled upon these two people. It was about seven o'clock. He stopped outside a linen draper's and peered over the goods in the window at the assistants in torment. He could have spent a whole day happily at that. He told himself that he was trying, in a purely professional spirit, to see how they dressed out the brass lines over their counters, but down at the very bottom of his heart he knew better. The customers were a secondary consideration, and it was only after the lapse of perhaps a minute that he perceived that among them was—the Young Lady in Grey! He turned away from the window at once, and saw the other man in brown standing at the edge of the pavement and regarding him with a very curious expression of face.

There came into Mr. Hoopdriver's head the curious problem whether he was to be regarded as a nuisance haunting these people, or whether they were to be regarded as a nuisance haunting him. He abandoned the solution at last in despair, quite unable to decide upon the course he should take at the next encounter, whether he should scowl savagely at the couple or assume an attitude eloquent of apology and propitiation.

THE IMAGININGS OF MR. HOOPDRIVER'S HEART

X

MR. HOOPDRIVER was (in the days of this story) a poet, though he had never written a line of verse. Or perhaps romancer will describe him better. Like I know not how many of those who do the fetching and carrying of life,—a great number of them certainly,—his real life was absolutely uninteresting, and if he had faced it as realistically as such people do in Mr. Gissing's novels, he would probably have come by way of drink to suicide in the course of a year. But that was just what he had the natural wisdom not to do. On the contrary, he was always decorating his existence with imaginative tags, hopes, and poses, deliberate and yet quite effectual self-deceptions; his experiences were mere material for a romantic superstructure. If some power had given Hoopdriver the "giftie" Burns invoked, "to see oursels as ithers see us," he would probably have given it away to some one else at the very earliest opportunity. His entire life, you must understand, was not a continuous romance, but a series of short stories linked only by the general resemblance of their hero, a brown-haired young fellow commonly, with blue eyes and a fair moustache, graceful rather than strong, sharp and resolute rather than clever (cf., as the scientific books say, p. 2). Invariably this person possessed an iron will. The

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stories fluctuated indefinitely. The smoking of a cigarette converted Hoopdriver's hero into something entirely worldly, subtly rakish, with a humorous twinkle in the eye and some gallant sinning in the background. You should have seen Mr. Hoopdriver promenading the brilliant gardens at Earl's Court on an early-closing night. His meaning glances! (I dare not give the meaning.) Such an influence as the eloquence of a revivalist preacher would suffice to divert the story into absolutely different channels, make him a white-souled hero, a man still pure, walking untainted and brave and helpful through miry ways. The appearance of some daintily gloved frock-coated gentleman with buttonhole and eyeglass complete, gallantly attendant in the rear of customers, served again to start visions of a simplicity essentially Cromwell-like, of sturdy plainness, of a strong, silent man going righteously through the world. This day there had predominated a fine leisurely person immaculately clothed, and riding on an unexceptional machine, a mysterious person—quite unostentatious, but with accidental self-revelation of something over the common, even a "bloomin' Dook," it might be incognito, on the tour of the South Coast.

You must not think that there was any *telling* of these stories of this life-long series by Mr. Hoopdriver. He never dreamt that they were known to a soul. If it were not for the trouble, I would, I think, go back and rewrite this section from the beginning, expunging the statements that Hoopdriver was a poet and a romancer, and saying instead that he was a playwright and acted his own plays. He

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was not only the sole performer but the entire audience, and the entertainment kept him almost continuously happy. Yet even that playwright comparison scarcely expresses all the facts of the case. After all, very many of his dreams never got acted at all, possibly indeed most of them, the dreams of a solitary walk for instance, or of a tramcar ride, the dreams dreamt behind the counter while trade was slack and mechanical foldings and rollings occupied his muscles. Most of them were little dramatic situations, crucial dialogues, the return of Mr. Hoopdriver to his native village, for instance, in a well-cut holiday suit and natty gloves, the unheard asides of the rival neighbours, the delight of the old "mater," the intelligence—"A ten-pound rise all at once from Antrobus, mater. Whad d'yer think of that?" or again, the first whispering of love, dainty and witty and tender, to the girl he served a few days ago with sateen, or a gallant rescue of generalised beauty in distress from truculent insult or ravening dog.

So many people do this—and you never suspect it. You see a tattered lad selling matches in the street, and you think there is nothing between him and the bleakness of immensity, between him and utter abasement, but a few tattered rags and a feeble musculature. And all unseen by you a host of heaven-sent fatuities swathes him about, even, maybe, as they swathe you about. (Many men have never seen their own profiles or the backs of their heads, and for the back of your own mind no mirror has been invented.) They swathe him about so thickly that the pricks of fate scarce penetrate to him, or become but a pleasant

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titillation. And so, indeed, it is with all of us who go on living. Self-deception is the anæsthetic of life, while God is carving out our beings.

But to return from this general vivisection to Mr. Hoopdriver's imaginings. You see now how external our view has been; we have had but the slightest transitory glimpses of the drama within, of how the things looked in the magic mirror of Mr. Hoopdriver's mind. On the road to Guildford and during his encounters with his haunting fellow-cyclists the drama had presented chiefly the quiet gentleman to whom we have alluded; but at Guildford, under more varied stimuli, he burgeoned out more variously. A casual house agent's window, for instance, set him upon a charming little comedy. He would go in, make inquiries about that thirty-pound house, get the key possibly and go over it—the thing would stimulate the clerk's curiosity immensely. He searched his mind for a reason for this proceeding and discovered that he was a dynamiter needing privacy. Upon that theory he procured the key, explored the house carefully, said darkly that it might suit his special needs, but that there were *others* to consult. The clerk, however, did not understand the allusion, and merely pitied him as one who had married young and paired himself to a stronger mind than his own.

This proceeding in some occult way led to the purchase of a note-book and pencil, and that started the conception of an artist taking notes. That was a little game Mr. Hoopdriver had, in congenial company, played in his still younger days—to the infinite

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annoyance of quite a number of respectable excursionists at Hastings. In early days Mr. Hoopdriver had been, as his mother proudly boasted, a "bit of a drawer," but a conscientious and normally stupid schoolmaster perceived the incipient talent and had nipped it in the bud by a series of lessons in art. However, our principal character figured about quite happily in old corners of Guildford, and once the other man in brown, looking out of the bay window of the Earl of Kent, saw him standing in a corner by a gateway, note-book in hand, busily sketching the Earl's imposing features. At which sight the other man in brown started back from the centre of the window so as to be hidden from him, and crouching slightly, watched him intently through the interstices of the lace curtains.

OMISSIONS

XI

Now the rest of the acts of Mr. Hoopdriver in Guildford, on the great opening day of his holidays, are not to be detailed here. How he wandered about the old town in the dusk, and up to the Hogsback to see the little lamps below and the little stars above come out one after another; how he returned through the yellow-lit streets to the Yellow Hammer Coffee Tavern and supped bravely in the commercial room—a Man among Men; how he joined in the talk about flying-machines and the possibilities of electricity, witnessing that flying-machines were “dead certain to come,” and that electricity was “wonderful, wonderful”; how he went and watched the billiard playing and said, “Left ’em” several times with an oracular air; how he fell a-yawning; and how he got out his cycling map and studied it intently,—are things that find no record here. Nor will I enlarge upon his going into the writing-room, and marking the road from London to Guildford with a fine, bright line of the reddest of red ink. In his little cyclist hand-book there is a diary, and in the diary there is an entry of these things—it is there to this day, and I cannot do better than reproduce it here to witness that this book is indeed a true one, and no lying fable written to while away an hour.

At last he fell a-yawning so much that very reluctantly indeed he set about finishing this great and

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splendid day. (Alas! that all days must end at last!) He got his candle in the hall from a friendly waiting-maid, and passed upward—whither a modest novelist, who writes for the family circle, dare not follow. Yet I may tell you that he knelt down at his bedside, happy and drowsy, and said, “Our Father ’chartin’ ’eaven,” even as he had learned it by rote from his mother nearly twenty years ago. And anon when his breathing had become deep and regular, we may creep into his bedroom and catch him at his dreams. He is lying upon his left side, with his arm under the pillow. It is dark, and he is hidden; but if you could have seen his face, sleeping there in the darkness, I think you would have perceived in spite of that treasured, thin, and straggling moustache, in spite of your memory of the coarse words he had used that day, that the man before you was, after all, only a little child asleep.

THE DREAMS OF MR. HOOPDRIVER

XII

BEHIND those drawn blinds in the darkness, you have just seen Mr. Hoopdriver's face peaceful in its beauty sleep in the small, plain bedroom at the very top of the Yellow Hammer Coffee Tavern at Guildford. That was before midnight. As the night progressed he was disturbed by dreams.

After your first day of cycling one dream is inevitable. A memory of motion lingers in the muscles of your legs, and round and round they seem to go. You ride through Dreamland on wonderful dream bicycles that change and grow; you ride down steeples and staircases and over precipices; you hover in horrible suspense over inhabited towns, vainly seeking for a brake your hand cannot find, to save you from a headlong fall; you plunge into weltering rivers, and rush helplessly at monstrous obstacles. Anon Mr. Hoopdriver found himself riding out of the darkness of non-existence, pedalling Ezekiel's Wheels across the Weald of Surrey, jolting over the hills and smashing villages in his course, while the other man in brown cursed and swore at him and shouted to stop his career. There was the Putney heath-keeper, too, and the man in drab raging at him. He felt an awful fool, a—what was it?—a juggins, ah!—a Juggernaut. The villages went off one after another with a soft, squashing noise. He did not see the Young Lady in Grey, but he knew she

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was looking at his back. He dared not look round. Where the devil was the brake? It must have fallen off. And the bell? Right in front of him was Guildford. He tried to shout and warn the town to get out of the way, but his voice was gone as well. Nearer, nearer! it was fearful! and in another moment the houses were cracking like nuts and the blood of the inhabitants squirting this way and that. The streets were black with people running. Right under his wheels he saw the Young Lady in Grey. A feeling of horror came upon Mr. Hoopdriver; he flung himself sideways to descend, forgetting how high he was, and forthwith he began falling, falling, falling.

He woke up, turned over, saw the moonlight on the window, wondered a little, and went to sleep again.

This second dream went back into the first somehow, and the other man in brown came threatening and shouting towards him. He grew uglier and uglier as he approached, and his expression was intolerably evil. He came and looked close into Mr. Hoopdriver's eyes and then receded to an incredible distance. His face seemed to be luminous. "*Miss Beaumont,*" he said, and splashed up a spray of suspicion. Some one began letting off fireworks, chiefly Catherine wheels, down the shop, though Mr. Hoopdriver knew it was against the rules. For it seemed that the place they were in was a vast shop, and then Mr. Hoopdriver perceived that the other man in brown was the shop-walker, differing from most shop-walkers in the fact that he was lit

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from within as a Chinese lantern might be. And the customer Mr. Hoopdriver was going to serve was the Young Lady in Grey. Curious he hadn't noticed it before. She was in grey as usual,—rationals,—and she had her bicycle leaning against the counter. She smiled quite frankly at him, just as she had done when she had apologised for stopping him. And her form, as she leaned towards him, was full of a sinuous grace he had never noticed before. "What can I have the pleasure?" said Mr. Hoopdriver at once, and she said, "The Ripley road." So he got out the Ripley road and unrolled it and showed it to her, and she said that would do very nicely, and kept on looking at him and smiling, and he began measuring off eight miles by means of the yard measure on the counter, eight miles being a dress length, a rational dress length, that is; and then the other man in brown came up and wanted to interfere, and said Mr. Hoopdriver was a cad, besides measuring it off too slowly. And as Mr. Hoopdriver began to measure faster, the other man in brown said the Young Lady in Grey had been there long enough, and that he *was* her brother, or else she would not be travelling with him, and he suddenly whipped his arm about her waist and made off with her. It occurred to Mr. Hoopdriver even at the moment that this was scarcely brotherly behaviour. Of course it wasn't! The sight of the other man gripping her so familiarly enraged him frightfully; he leaped over the counter forthwith and gave chase. They ran round the shop and up an iron staircase into the Keep, and so out upon the Ripley road. For some time they

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kept dodging in and out of a wayside hotel with two front doors and an inn yard. The other man could not run very fast because he had hold of the Young Lady in Grey, but Mr. Hoopdriver was hampered by the absurd behaviour of his legs. They would not stretch out; they would keep going round and round as if they were on the treadles of a wheel, so that he made the smallest steps conceivable. This dream came to no crisis. The chase seemed to last an interminable time, and all kinds of people, heath-keepers, shopmen, policemen, the old man in the Keep, the angry man in drab, the barmaid at the Unicorn, men with flying-machines, people playing billiards in the doorways, silly, headless figures, stupid cocks and hens encumbered with parcels and umbrellas and waterproofs, people carrying bedroom candles, and such-like ruff, kept getting in his way and annoying him, although he sounded his electric bell, and said, "Wonderful, wonderful!" at every corner. . . .

HOW MR. HOOPDRIVER WENT TO HASLEMERE

XIII

THERE was some little delay in getting Mr. Hoopdriver's breakfast, so that after all he was not free to start out of Guildford until just upon the stroke of nine. He wheeled his machine from the High Street in some perplexity. He did not know whether this young lady, who had seized hold of his imagination so strongly, and her unfriendly and possibly menacing brother, were ahead of him or even now breakfasting somewhere in Guildford. In the former case he might loiter as he chose; in the latter he must hurry, and possibly take refuge in branch roads.

It occurred to him as being in some obscure way strategic, that he would leave Guildford not by the obvious Portsmouth road, but by the road running through Shalford. Along this pleasant shady way he felt sufficiently secure to resume his exercises in riding with one hand off the handles, and in staring over his shoulder. He upset once or twice, but fell on his foot each time, and perceived that he was improving. Before he got to Bramley a specious by-way snapped him up, ran with him for half a mile or more, and dropped him again, as a terrier drops a walking-stick, upon the Portsmouth road a couple of miles from Godalming. He entered Godalming on his feet, for the road through that delightful town is beyond dispute the vilest in the world, a mere tumult

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of road metal, a way of peaks and precipices, and, after a successful experiment with cider at the Wool-pack, he pushed on to Milford.

All this time he was acutely aware of the existence of the Young Lady in Grey and her companion in brown, as a child in the dark is of Bogies. Sometimes he could hear their pneumatics stealing upon him from behind, and looking round saw a long stretch of vacant road. Once he saw far ahead of him a glittering wheel, but it proved to be a working man riding to destruction on a very tall ordinary. And he felt a strange vague uneasiness about that Young Lady in Grey, for which he was altogether unable to account. Now that he was awake he had forgotten the accentuated "Miss Beaumont" that had been quite clear in his dream. But the curious dream conviction that the girl was not really the man's sister, would not let itself be forgotten. Why, for instance, should a man want to be alone with his sister on the top of a tower? At Milford his bicycle made, so to speak, an ass of itself. A finger-post suddenly jumped out at him, vainly indicating an abrupt turn to the right, and Mr. Hoopdriver would have slowed up and read the inscription, but no!—the bicycle would not let him. The road dropped a little into Milford, and the thing shied, put down its head and bolted, and Mr. Hoopdriver only thought of the brake when the finger-post was passed. Then to have recovered the point of intersection would have meant dismounting. For as yet there was no road wide enough for Mr. Hoopdriver to turn in. So he went on his way—or to be precise, he did exactly the opposite thing. The road to the right was

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the Portsmouth road, and this he was on went to Haslemere and Midhurst. By that error it came about that he once more came upon his fellow-travellers of yesterday, coming on them suddenly, without the slightest preliminary announcement and when they least expected it, under the Southwestern Railway arch. "It's horrible," said a girlish voice; "it's brutal—cowardly—" And stopped.

His expression, as he shot out from the archway at them, may have been something between a grin of recognition and a scowl of annoyance at himself for the unintentional intrusion. But disconcerted as he was, he was yet able to appreciate something of the peculiarity of their mutual attitudes. The bicycles were lying by the roadside, and the two riders stood face to face. The other man in brown's attitude, as it flashed upon Hoopdriver, was a deliberate pose; he twirled his moustache and smiled faintly, and he was conscientiously looking amused. And the girl stood rigid, her arms straight by her side, her handkerchief clenched in her hand, and her face was flushed, with the faintest touch of red upon her eyelids. She seemed to Mr. Hoopdriver's sense to be indignant. But that was the impression of a second. A mask of surprised recognition fell across this revelation of emotion as she turned her head towards him, and the pose of the other man in brown vanished too in a momentary astonishment. And then he had passed them, and was riding on towards Haslemere to make what he could of the swift picture that had photographed itself on his brain.

"Rum," said Mr. Hoopdriver. "It's *dashed* rum!
"They were having a row.

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“Smirking—” What he called the other man in brown need not trouble us.

“Annoying her!” That any human being should do that!

“*Why?*”

The impulse to interfere leaped suddenly into Mr. Hoopdriver’s mind. He grasped his brake, descended, and stood looking hesitatingly back. They still stood by the railway bridge, and it seemed to Mr. Hoopdriver’s fancy that she was stamping her foot. He hesitated, then turned his bicycle round, mounted, and rode back towards them, gripping his courage firmly lest it should slip away and leave him ridiculous. “I’ll offer ’im a screw ’ammer,” said Mr. Hoopdriver. Then with a wave of fierce emotion he saw that the girl was crying. In another moment they heard him and turned in surprise. Certainly she had been crying; her eyes were swimming in tears, and the other man in brown looked exceedingly disconcerted. Mr. Hoopdriver descended and stood over his machine.

“Nothing wrong, I hope?” he said, looking the other man in brown squarely in the face. “No accident?”

“Nothing,” said the other man in brown shortly. “Nothing at all, thanks.”

“But,” said Mr. Hoopdriver with a great effort, “the young lady is crying. I thought perhaps——”

The Young Lady in Grey started, gave Hoopdriver one swift glance, and covered one eye with her handkerchief. “It’s this speck,” she said. “This speck of dust in my eye.”

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“This lady,” said the other man in brown, explaining, “has a gnat in her eye.”

There was a pause. The young lady busied herself with her eye. “I believe it’s out,” she said. The other man in brown made movements indicating commiserating curiosity concerning the alleged fly. Mr. Hoopdriver—the word is his own—stood flabbergasted. He had all the intuition of the simple-minded. He knew there was no fly. But the ground was suddenly cut from his feet. There is a limit to knight-errantry—dragons and false knights are all very well, but flies! Fictitious flies! Whatever the trouble was, it was evidently not his affair. He felt he had made a fool of himself again. He would have mumbled some sort of apology; but the other man in brown gave him no time, turned on him abruptly, even fiercely. “I hope,” he said, “that your curiosity is satisfied?”

“Certainly,” said Mr. Hoopdriver.

“Then we won’t detain you.”

And, ignominiously, Mr. Hoopdriver turned his machine about, struggled upon it, and resumed the road southward. And when he learned that he was not on the Portsmouth road, it was impossible to turn and go back, for that would be to face his shame again, and so he had to ride on by Brook Street up the hill to Haslemere. And away to the right the Portsmouth road mocked at him and made off to its fastnesses amid the sunlit green and purple masses of Hindhead, where Mr. Grant Allen writes his Hill Top Novels day by day.

The sun shone, and the wide blue hill-views and

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pleasant valleys one saw on either hand from the sand-scarred roadway, even the sides of the road itself set about with grey heather scrub and prickly masses of gorse, and pine-trees with their year's growth still bright green, against the darkened needles of the previous years, were fresh and delightful to Mr. Hoopdriver's eyes. But the brightness of the day and the day-old sense of freedom fought an uphill fight against his intolerable vexation at that abominable encounter, and had still to win it when he reached Haslemere. A great brown shadow, a monstrous hatred of the other man in brown, possessed him. He had conceived the brilliant idea of abandoning Portsmouth, or at least giving up the straight way to his fellow-wayfarers, and of striking out boldly to the left, eastward. He did not dare to stop at any of the inviting public houses in the main street of Haslemere, but turned up a side way and found a little beer-shop, the Good Hope, wherein to refresh himself. And there he ate and gossiped condescendingly with an aged labourer, assuming the while for his own private enjoyment the attributes of a Lost Heir, and afterwards mounted and rode on towards North-chapel, a place which a number of finger-posts conspired to boom, but which some insidious turning prevented him from attaining.

HOW MR. HOOPDRIVER REACHED MIDHURST

XIV

It was one of my uncle's profoundest remarks that human beings are the only unreasonable creatures. This observation was so far justified by Mr. Hoopdriver that, after spending the morning tortuously avoiding the other man in brown and the Young Lady in Grey, he spent a considerable part of the afternoon in thinking about the Young Lady in Grey, and contemplating in an optimistic spirit the possibility of seeing her again. Memory and imagination played round her, so that his course was largely determined by the windings of the road he traversed. Of one general proposition he was absolutely convinced. "There's something Juicy wrong with 'em," said he—once even aloud. But what it was he could not imagine. He recapitulated the facts. "Miss Beaumont"—brother and sister—and the stoppage to quarrel and weep—it was perplexing material for a young man of small experience. There was no exertion he hated so much as inference, and after a time he gave up any attempt to get at the realities of the case, and let his imagination go free. Should he ever see her again? Suppose he did—with that other chap not about. The vision he found pleasantest was an encounter with her, an unexpected encounter at the annual Dancing Class "Do" at the Putney Assembly Rooms. Somehow they would drift together, and he would dance with her again

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and again. It was a pleasant vision, for you must understand that Mr. Hoopdriver danced uncommonly well. Or again, in the shop, a sudden radiance in the doorway and she is bowed towards the Manchester counter. And then to lean over that counter and murmur, seemingly *à propos* of the goods under discussion, "I have not forgotten that morning on the Portsmouth road," and lower, "I never shall forget."

At Northchapel Mr. Hoopdriver consulted his map and took counsel and weighed his course of action. Petworth seemed a possible resting-place, or Pulborough; Midhurst seemed too near, and any place over the Downs beyond, too far, and so he meandered towards Petworth, posing himself perpetually and loitering, gathering wild flowers and wondering why they had no names—for he had never heard of any—dropping them furtively at the sight of a stranger, and generally "mucking about." There were purple vetches in the hedges, meadowsweet, honeysuckle, belated brambles—but the dog-roses had already gone; there were green and red blackberries, stellarias, and dandelions, and in another place white dead nettles, traveller's-joy, clinging bedstraw, grasses flowering, white campions, and ragged robins. One corn field was glorious with poppies, bright scarlet and purple white, and the blue corn-flowers were beginning. In the lanes the trees met overhead, and the wisps of hay still hung to the straggling hedges. In one of the main roads he steered a perilous passage through a dozen surly dun oxen. Here and there were little cottages, and picturesque beer-houses with the vivid brewers' boards of blue and scarlet, and

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once a broad green and a church, and an expanse of some hundred houses or so. Then he came to a pebbly rivulet that emerged between clumps of sedge, loosestrife and forget-me-nots under an arch of trees and rippled across the road; and there he dismounted, longing to take off shoes and stockings—those stylish chequered stockings were now all dimmed with dust—and paddle his lean legs in the chuckling cheerful water. But instead he sat in a manly attitude, smoking a cigarette, for fear lest the Young Lady in Grey should come glittering round the corner. For the flavour of the Young Lady in Grey was present through it all, mixing with the flowers and all the delight of it, a touch that made this second day quite different from the first, an undertow of expectation, anxiety, and something like regret, that would not be ignored.

It was only late in the long evening that, quite abruptly, he began to repent, vividly and decidedly, having fled these two people. He was getting hungry, and hunger has a curious effect upon the emotional colouring of our minds. The man was a sinister brute, Hoopdriver saw in a flash of inspiration, and the girl—she was in some serious trouble. And he who might have helped her had taken his first impulse as decisive—and bolted. This new view of it depressed him dreadfully. What might not be happening to her now? He thought again of her tears. Surely it was merely his duty, seeing the trouble afoot, to keep his eye upon it.

He began riding fast to get quit of such self-reproaches. He found himself in a tortuous tangle of

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roads, and as the dusk was coming on, emerged not at Petworth but at Easebourne, a mile from Midhurst. "I'm getting hungry," said Mr. Hoopdriver, inquiring of a gamekeeper in Easebourne village. "Midhurst a mile, and Petworth five!—Thanks, I'll take Midhurst."

He came into Midhurst by the bridge at the water-mill, and up the North Street; and a small shop flourishing cheerfully the cheerful sign of a teapot, and exhibiting a brilliant array of tobaccos, sweets, and children's toys in the window, struck his fancy. A neat bright-eyed little old lady made him welcome, and he was presently supping sumptuously on sausages and tea, with a visitors' book full of the most humorous and flattering remarks about the little old lady, in verse and prose, propped up against his teapot as he ate. Regular good some of the jokes were, and rhymes that read well—even with your mouth full of sausage. Mr. Hoopdriver formed a vague idea of "drawing something"—for his judgment on the little old lady was already formed. He pictured the little old lady discovering it afterwards—"My gracious! One of them *Punch* men," she would say. The room had a curtained recess and a chest of drawers, for presently it was to be his bedroom, and the day part of it was decorated with framed Odd-fellows' certificates and gilt-backed books and portraits, and kettle-holders and all kinds of beautiful things made out of wool; very comfortable it was indeed. The window was lead framed and diamond paned, and through it one saw the corner of the vicarage and a pleasant hill crest in dusky silhouette

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against the twilight sky. And after the sausages had ceased to be, he lit a Red Herring cigarette and went swaggering out into the twilight street. All shadowy blue between its dark brick houses was the street, with a bright yellow window here and there and splashes of green and red where the chemist's illumination fell across the road.

AN INTERLUDE

XV

AND now let us for a space leave Mr. Hoopdriver in the dusky Midhurst North Street, and return to the two folks beside the railway bridge between Milford and Haslemere. She was a girl of eighteen, dark, fine featured, with bright eyes, and a rich swift colour under her warm-tinted skin. Her eyes were all the brighter for the tears that swam in them. The man was thirty-three or four, fair, with a longish nose overhanging his sandy flaxen moustache, pale blue eyes, and a head that stuck out above and behind. He stood with his feet wide apart, his hand on his hip, in an attitude that was equally suggestive of defiance and aggression. They had watched Hoopdriver out of sight. The unexpected interruption had stopped the flood of her tears. He tugged his abundant moustache and regarded her calmly. She stood with face averted, obstinately resolved not to speak first. "Your behaviour," he said at last, "makes you conspicuous."

She turned upon him, her eyes and cheeks glowing, her hands clenched. "You unspeakable *cad*," she said and choked, stamped her little foot, and stood panting.

"Unspeakable *cad*! My dear girl! Possibly I *am* an unspeakable *cad*. Who wouldn't be—for you?"

"Dear girl!" How *dare* you speak to me like that? *You*——"

"I would do anything——"

AN INTERLUDE

“*Oh!*”

There was a moment's pause. She looked squarely into his face, her eyes alight with anger and contempt, and perhaps he flushed a little. He stroked his moustache, and by an effort maintained his cynical calm. “Let us be reasonable,” he said.

“Reasonable! That means all that is mean and cowardly and sensual in the world.”

“You have always had it so—in your generalising way. But let us look at the facts of the case—if that pleases you better.”

With an impatient gesture she motioned him to go on.

“Well,” he said,—“you've eloped.”

“I've left my home,” she corrected with dignity. “I left my home because it was unendurable. Because that woman——”

“Yes, yes. But the point is, you have eloped with me.”

“You came with me. You pretended to be my friend. Promised to help me to earn a living by writing. It was you who said, why shouldn't a man and woman be friends? And now you dare—you dare——”

“Really, Jessie, this pose of yours, this injured innocence——”

“I will go back. I forbid you—I forbid you to stand in the way——”

“One moment. I have always thought that my little pupil was at least clear-headed. You don't know everything yet, you know. Listen to me for a moment.”

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“Haven’t I been listening? And you have only insulted me. You who dared only to talk of friendship, who scarcely dared hint at anything beyond.”

“But you took the hints, nevertheless. You knew. You *knew*. And you did not mind. *Mind!* You liked it. It was the fun of the whole thing for you. That I loved you, and could not speak to you. You played with it——”

“You have said all that before. Do you think that justifies you?”

“That isn’t all. I made up my mind—Well, to make the game more even. And so I suggested to you and joined with you in this expedition of yours, invented a sister at Midhurst—I tell you, I *haven’t* a sister! For one object——”

“Well?”

“To compromise you.”

She started. That was a new way of putting it. For half a minute neither spoke. Then she began half defiantly: “Much I am compromised. Of course—I have made a fool of myself——”

“My dear girl, you are still on the sunny side of eighteen, and you know very little of this world. Less than you think. But you will learn. Before you write all those novels we have talked about, you will have to learn. And that’s one point——” He hesitated. “You started and blushed when the man at breakfast called you Ma’am. You thought it a funny mistake, but you did not say anything because he was young and nervous—and besides, the thought of being my wife offended your modesty. You didn’t care to notice it. But—you see; I gave your name

AN INTERLUDE

as *Mrs. Beaumont*.” He looked almost apologetic, in spite of his cynical pose. “*Mrs. Beaumont*,” he repeated, pulling his flaxen moustache and watching the effect.

She looked into his eyes speechless. “I am learning fast,” she said slowly, at last.

He thought the time had come for an emotional attack. “*Jessie*,” he said, with a sudden change of voice, “I know all this is mean, is villainous. But do you think that I have done all this scheming, all this subterfuge, for any other object——”

She did not seem to listen to his words. “I shall ride home,” she said abruptly.

“To her?”

She winced.

“Just think,” said he, “what she could say to you after this.”

“Anyhow, I shall leave you now.”

“Yes? And go——”

“Go somewhere to earn my living, to be a free woman, to live without conventionality——”

“My dear girl, do let us be cynical. You haven’t money and you haven’t credit. No one would take you in. It’s one of two things: go back to your stepmother, or—trust to me.”

“How can I?”

“Then you must go back to her.” He paused momentarily, to let this consideration have its proper weight. “*Jessie*, I did not mean to say the things I did. Upon my honour, I lost my head when I spoke so. If you will, forgive me. I am a man. I could not help myself. Forgive me, and I promise you——”

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"How can I trust you?"

"Try me. I can assure you——"

She regarded him distrustfully.

"At any rate, ride on with me now. Surely we have been in the shadow of this horrible bridge long enough."

"Oh! let me think," she said, half turning from him and pressing her hand to her brow.

"*Think!* Look here, Jessie. It is ten o'clock. Shall we call a truce until one?"

She hesitated, demanded a definition of the truce, and at last agreed.

They mounted, and rode on in silence, through the sunlight and the heather. Both were extremely uncomfortable and disappointed. She was pale, divided between fear and anger. She perceived she was in a scrape, and tried in vain to think of a way of escape. Only one tangible thing would keep in her mind, try as she would to ignore it. That was the quite irrelevant fact that his head was singularly like an albino cocoanut. He, too, felt thwarted. He felt that this romantic business of seduction was, after all, unexpectedly tame. But this was only the beginning. At any rate, every day she spent with him was a day gained. Perhaps things looked worse than they were; that was some consolation.

OF THE ARTIFICIAL IN MAN, AND OF THE ZEITGEIST

XVI

YOU have seen these two young people—Bechamel, by-the-bye, is the man's name, and the girl's is Jessie Milton—from the outside; you have heard them talking; they ride now side by side (but not too close together, and in an uneasy silence) towards Haslemere; and this chapter will concern itself with those curious little council chambers inside their skulls, where their motives are in session and their acts are considered and passed.

But first a word concerning wigs and false teeth. Some jester, enlarging upon the increase of bald heads and purblind people, has deduced a wonderful future for the children of men. Man, he said, was nowadays a hairless creature by forty or fifty, and for hair we gave him a wig; shrivelled, and we padded him; toothless, and lo! false teeth set in gold. Did he lose a limb, and a fine, new, artificial one was at his disposal; get indigestion, and to hand was artificial digestive fluid or bile or pancreatine, as the case might be. Complexions, too, were replaceable, spectacles superseded an inefficient eye-lens, and imperceptible false diaphragms were thrust into the failing ear. So he went over our anatomies, until, at last, he had conjured up a weird thing of shreds and patches, a simulacrum, an artificial body

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of a man with but a doubtful germ of living flesh lurking somewhere in his recesses. To that, he held, we were coming.

How far such an odd substitution for the body is possible need not concern us now. But the devil, speaking by the lips of Mr. Rudyard Kipling, hath it that in the case of one Tomlinson, the thing, so far as the soul is concerned, has already been accomplished. Time was when men had simple souls, desires as natural as their eyes, a little reasonable philanthropy, a little reasonable philoprogenitiveness, hunger and a taste for good living, a decent, personal vanity, a healthy, satisfying pugnacity, and so forth. But now we are taught and disciplined for years and years, and thereafter we read and read for all the time some strenuous, nerve-destroying business permits. Pedagogic hypnotists, pulpit and platform hypnotists, book-writing hypnotists, newspaper-writing hypnotists, are at us all. This sugar you are eating, they tell us, is ink, and forthwith we reject it with infinite disgust. This black draught of unrequited toil is True Happiness, and down it goes with every symptom of pleasure. This Ibsen, they say, is dull past believing, and we yawn and stretch beyond endurance. Pardon! they interrupt, but this Ibsen is deep and delightful, and we vie with one another in an excess of entertainment. And when we open the heads of these two young people, we find, not a straightforward motive on the surface anywhere; we find, indeed, not a soul so much as an oversoul, a zeitgeist, a congestion of acquired ideas, a highway's feast of fine, confused

OF THE ARTIFICIAL IN MAN

thinking. The girl is resolute to Live Her Own Life, a phrase you may have heard before, and the man has a pretty perverted ambition to be a cynical artistic person of the very calmest description. He is hoping for the awakening of Passion in her, among other things. He knows Passion ought to awaken, from the textbooks he has studied. He knows she admires his genius, but he is unaware that she does not admire his head. He is quite a distinguished art critic in London, and he met her at that celebrated lady novelist's, her stepmother, and here you have them well embarked upon the Adventure. Both are in the first stage of repentance, which consists, as you have probably found for yourself, in setting your teeth hard and saying, "*I will go on.*"

Things, you see, have jarred a little, and they ride on their way together with a certain aloofness of manner that promises ill for the orthodox development of the Adventure. He perceives he was too precipitate. But he feels his honour is involved, and meditates the development of a new attack. And the girl? She is unawakened. Her motives are bookish, written by a haphazard syndicate of authors, novelists, and biographers, on her white inexperience. An artificial oversoul she is, that may presently break down and reveal a human being beneath it. She is still in that schoolgirl phase when a talkative old man is more interesting than a tongue-tied young one, and when to be an eminent mathematician, say, or to edit a daily paper, seems as fine an ambition as any girl need aspire to. Bechamel was to have helped her to attain that in the most expeditious

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manner, and here he is beside her, talking enigmatical phrases about passion, looking at her with the oddest expression, and once, and that was his gravest offence, offering to kiss her. At any rate he has apologised. She still scarcely realises, you see, the scrape she has got into.

THE ENCOUNTER AT MIDHURST

XVII

WE left Mr. Hoopdriver at the door of the small tea, toy, and tobacco shop. You must not think that a strain is put on coincidence when I tell you that next door to Mrs. Wardor's—that was the name of the bright-eyed, little old lady with whom Mr. Hoopdriver had stopped—is the Angel Hotel, and in the Angel Hotel on the night that Mr. Hoopdriver reached Midhurst, were "Mr." and "Miss" Beaumont, our Bechamel and Jessie Milton. Indeed, it was a highly probable thing; for if one goes through Guildford, the choice of southward roads is limited; you may go by Petersfield to Portsmouth, or by Midhurst to Chichester, in addition to which highways there is nothing for it but minor roadways to Petworth or Pulborough and cross-cuts Brightonward. And coming to Midhurst from the north, the Angel's entrance lies yawning to engulf your highly respectable cyclists, while Mrs. Wardor's genial teapot is equally attractive to those who weigh their means in little scales. But to people unfamiliar with the Sussex roads—and such were the three persons of this story—the convergence did not appear to be so inevitable.

Bechamel, tightening his chain in the Angel yard after dinner, was the first to be aware of their reunion. He saw Hoopdriver walk slowly across the gateway, his head enhaloed in cigarette smoke, and

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pass out of sight up the street. Incontinently a mass of cloudy uneasiness that had been partly dispelled during the day, reappeared and concentrated rapidly into definite suspicion. He put his screw hammer into his pocket, and walked through the archway into the street to settle the business forthwith, for he prided himself on his decision. Hoopdriver was merely promenading, and they met face to face.

At the sight of his adversary, something between disgust and laughter seized Mr. Hoopdriver and for a moment destroyed his animosity. "'Ere we are again!" he said, laughing insincerely in a sudden outbreak at the perversity of chance.

The other man in brown stopped short in Mr. Hoopdriver's way, staring. Then his face assumed an expression of dangerous civility. "Is it any information to you," he said with immense politeness, "when I remark that you are following us?"

Mr. Hoopdriver, for some occult reason, resisted his characteristic impulse to apologise. He wanted to annoy the other man in brown, and a sentence that had come into his head in a previous rehearsal cropped up appropriately. "Since when," said Mr. Hoopdriver, catching his breath, yet bringing the question out valiantly nevertheless,—"since when 'ave you purchased the county of Sussex?"

"May I point out," said the other man in brown, "that I object—we object not only to your proximity to us. To be frank—you appear to be following us—with an object."

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“You can always,” said Mr. Hoopdriver, “turn round if you don’t like it, and go back the way you came.”

“Oh-o!” said the other man in brown. “*That’s* it! I thought as much.”

“Did you?” said Mr. Hoopdriver, quite at sea, but rising pluckily to the unknown occasion. What was the man driving at?

“I see,” said the other man. “I see. I half suspected—” His manner changed abruptly to a quality suspiciously friendly. “Yes—a word with you. You will, I hope, give me ten minutes.”

Wonderful things were dawning on Mr. Hoopdriver. What did the other man take him for? Here at last was reality! He hesitated. Then he thought of an admirable phrase. “You ’ave some communication——”

“We’ll call it a communication,” said the other man.

“I can spare you the ten minutes,” said Mr. Hoopdriver, with dignity.

“This way, then,” said the other man in brown, and they walked slowly down the North Street towards the Grammar School. There was, perhaps, thirty seconds’ silence. The other man stroked his moustache nervously. Mr. Hoopdriver’s dramatic instincts were now fully awake. He did not quite understand in what *rôle* he was cast, but it was evidently something dark and mysterious. Doctor Conan Doyle, Victor Hugo, and Alexander Dumas were well within Mr. Hoopdriver’s range of reading, and he had not read them for nothing.

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"I will be perfectly frank with you," said the other man in brown.

"Frankness is always the best course," said Mr. Hoopdriver.

"Well, then—who the devil set you on this business?"

"Set me *on* this business?"

"Don't pretend to be stupid. Who's your employer? Who engaged you for this job?"

"Well," said Mr. Hoopdriver, confused. "No—I can't say."

"Quite sure?" The other man in brown glanced meaningly down at his hand, and Mr. Hoopdriver, following him mechanically, saw a yellow milled edge glittering in the twilight. Now your shop assistant is just above the tip-receiving class, and only just above it—so that he is acutely sensitive on the point.

Mr. Hoopdriver flushed hotly, and his eyes were angry as he met those of the other man in brown. "Stow it!" said Mr. Hoopdriver, stopping and facing the tempter.

"What!" said the other man in brown, surprised. "Eigh?" And so saying he stowed it in his breeches pocket.

"D'yer think I'm to be bribed?" said Mr. Hoopdriver, whose imagination was rapidly expanding the situation. "By Gosh! I'd follow you now——"

"My dear sir," said the other man in brown, "I beg your pardon. I misunderstood you. I really beg your pardon. Let us walk on. In your profession——"

THE ENCOUNTER AT MIDHURST

“What have you got to say against my profession?”

“Well, really, you know. There are detectives of an inferior description—watchers. The whole class. Private Inquiry—I did not realise—I really trust you will overlook what was, after all—you must admit—a natural indiscretion. Men of honour are not so common in the world—in any profession.”

It was lucky for Mr. Hoopdriver that in Midhurst they do not light the lamps in the summer time, or the one they were passing had betrayed him. As it was, he had to snatch suddenly at his moustache and tug fiercely at it, to conceal the furious tumult of exultation, the passion of laughter, that came boiling up. Detective! Even in the shadow Bechamel saw that a laugh was stifled, but he put it down to the fact that the phrase “men of honour” amused his interlocutor. “He’ll come round yet,” said Bechamel to himself. “He’s simply holding out for a fiver.” He coughed.

“I don’t see that it hurts you to tell me who your employer is.”

“Don’t you? I do.”

“Prompt,” said Bechamel, appreciatively. “Now here’s the thing I want to put to you—the kernel of the whole business. You need not answer if you don’t want to. There’s no harm done in my telling you what I want to know. Are you employed to watch me—or Miss Milton?”

“I’m not the leaky sort,” said Mr. Hoopdriver, keeping the secret he did not know with immense enjoyment. Miss Milton! That was her name.

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Perhaps he'd tell some more. "It's no good pumping. Is that all you're after?" said Mr. Hoopdriver.

Bechamel respected himself for his diplomatic gifts. He tried to catch a remark by throwing out a confidence. "I take it there are two people concerned in watching this affair."

"Who's the other?" said Mr. Hoopdriver, calmly, but controlling with enormous internal tension his self-appreciation. "Who's the other?" was really brilliant, he thought.

"There's my wife and *her* stepmother."

"And you want to know which it is?"

"Yes," said Bechamel.

"Well—arst 'em!" said Mr. Hoopdriver, his exultation getting the better of him, and with a pretty consciousness of repartee. "Arst 'em both."

Bechamel turned impatiently. Then he made a last effort. "I'd give a five-pound note to know just the precise state of affairs," he said.

"I told you to stow that," said Mr. Hoopdriver, in a threatening tone. And added with perfect truth and a magnificent mystery, "You don't quite understand who you're dealing with. But you will!" He spoke with such conviction that he half believed that that detective office of his in London—Baker Street, in fact—really existed.

With that the interview terminated. Bechamel went back to the Angel, perturbed. "Hang detectives!" It wasn't the kind of thing he had anticipated at all. Hoopdriver, with round eyes and a wondering smile, walked down to where the mill

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waters glittered in the moonlight, and after meditating over the parapet of the bridge for a space, with occasional murmurs of "Private Inquiry" and the like, returned, with mystery even in his paces, towards the town.

XVIII

THAT glee which finds expression in raised eyebrows and long, low whistling noises was upon Mr. Hoopdriver. For a space he forgot the tears of the Young Lady in Grey. Here was a new game!—and a real one. Mr. Hoopdriver as a Private Inquiry Agent, a Sherlock Holmes in fact, keeping these two people "under observation." He walked slowly back from the bridge until he was opposite the Angel, and stood for ten minutes, perhaps, contemplating that establishment and enjoying all the strange sensations of being this wonderful, this mysterious and terrible thing. Everything fell into place in his scheme. He had, of course, by a kind of instinct assumed the disguise of a cyclist, picked up the first old crock he came across as a means of pursuit. "No expense was to be spared."

Then he tried to understand what it was in particular that he was observing. "My wife"—"*Her* stepmother!" Then he remembered her swimming eyes. Abruptly came a wave of anger that surprised him, washed away the detective superstructure, and left him plain Mr. Hoopdriver. This man in brown, with his confident manner and his proffered half sovereign (damn him!) was up to no good, else why should he object to being watched? He was married! She

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was not his sister. He began to understand. A horrible suspicion of the state of affairs came into Mr. Hoopdriver's head. Surely it had not come to *that*. He was a detective!—he would find out. How was it to be done? He began to submit sketches on approval to himself. It required an effort before he could walk into the Angel bar. "A lemonade and bitter, please," said Mr. Hoopdriver.

He cleared his throat. "Are Mr. and Mrs. Bowlong stopping here?"

"What, a gentleman and a young lady—on bicycles?"

"Fairly young—a married couple."

"No," said the barmaid, a talkative person of ample dimensions. "There's no married couples stopping here. But there's a Mr. and Miss *Beaumont*." She spelt it for precision. "Sure you've got the name right, young man?"

"Quite," said Mr. Hoopdriver.

"Beaumont there is, but no one of the name of—What was the name you gave?"

"Bowlong," said Mr. Hoopdriver.

"No, there ain't no Bowlong," said the barmaid, taking up a glasscloth and a drying tumbler and beginning to polish the latter. "First off, I thought you might be asking for Beaumont—the names being similar. Were you expecting them on bicycles?"

"Yes—they said they *might* be in Midhurst to-night."

"P'raps they'll come presently. Beaumont's here, but no Bowlong. Sure that Beaumont ain't the name?"

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“Certain,” said Mr. Hoopdriver.

“It’s curious the names being so alike. I thought p’raps——”

And so they conversed at some length, Mr. Hoopdriver delighted to find his horrible suspicion disposed of. The barmaid having listened awhile at the staircase volunteered some particulars of the young couple upstairs. Her modesty was much impressed by the young lady’s costume, so she intimated, and Mr. Hoopdriver whispered the badinage natural to the occasion, at which she was coquetishly shocked. “There’ll be no knowing which is which, in a year or two,” said the barmaid. “And her manner too! She got off her machine and give it ’im to stick up against the kerb, and in she marched. ‘I and my brother,’ says she, ‘want to stop here to-night. My brother doesn’t mind what kind of room ’e ’as, but I want a room with a good view, if there’s one to be got,’ says she. He comes hurrying in after and looks at her. ‘I’ve settled the rooms,’ she says, and ’e says ‘damn!’ just like that. I can fancy my brother letting me boss the show like that.”

“I dessay you do,” said Mr. Hoopdriver, “if the truth was known.”

The barmaid looked down, smiled and shook her head, put down the tumbler, polished, and took up another that had been draining, and shook the drops of water into her zinc sink.

“She’ll be a nice little lot to marry,” said the barmaid. “She’ll be wearing the—well, b-dashes, as the sayin’ is. I can’t think what girls is comin’ to.”

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This depreciation of the Young Lady in Grey was hardly to Hoopdriver's taste.

"Fashion," said he, taking up his change. "Fashion is all the go with you ladies—and always was. You'll be wearing 'em yourself before a couple of years is out."

"Nice they'd look on my figger," said the barmaid, with a titter. "No—I ain't one of your fashionable sort. Gracious no! I shouldn't feel as if I'd anything on me, not more than if I'd forgot— Well, there! I'm talking." She put down the glass abruptly. "I dessay I'm old-fashioned," she said, and walked humming down the bar.

"Not you," said Mr. Hoopdriver. He waited until he caught her eye, then with his native courtesy smiled, raised his cap, and wished her good evening.

XIX

THEN Mr. Hoopdriver returned to the little room with the lead-framed windows where he had dined, and where the bed was now comfortably made, sat down on the box under the window, stared at the moon rising on the shining vicarage roof, and tried to collect his thoughts. How they whirled at first! It was past ten, and most of Midhurst was tucked away in bed and some one up the street was learning the violin; at rare intervals a belated inhabitant hurried home and woke the echoes, and a corncrake kept up a busy churning in the vicarage garden. The sky was deep blue, with a still luminous afterglow along the black edge of the hill, and the white moon

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overhead, save for a couple of yellow stars, had the sky to herself.

At first his thoughts were kinetic, of deeds and not relationships. There was this malefactor, and his victim, and it had fallen on Mr. Hoopdriver to take a hand in the game. *He* was married. Did she know he was married? Never for a moment did a thought of evil concerning her cross Hoopdriver's mind. Simple-minded people see questions of morals so much better than superior persons—who have read and thought themselves complex to impotence. He had heard her voice, seen the frank light in her eyes, and she had been weeping—that sufficed. The rights of the case he hadn't properly grasped. But he would. And that smirking—well, swine was the mildest for him. He recalled the exceedingly unpleasant incident of the railway bridge. “Thin we won't detain yer, thenks,” said Mr. Hoopdriver aloud, in a strange, unnatural, contemptible voice, supposed to represent that of Bechamel. “Oh, the *beggar!* I'll be level with him yet. He's afraid of us detectives—that I'll *swear.*” (If Mrs. Wardor should chance to be on the other side of the door within earshot, well and good.)

For a space he meditated chastisements and revenges, physical impossibilities for the most part,—Bechamel staggering headlong from the impact of Mr. Hoopdriver's large but, to tell the truth, ill-supported fist, Bechamel's five feet nine of height lifted from the ground and quivering under a vigorously applied horsewhip. So pleasant was such dreaming, that Mr. Hoopdriver's peaked face under the moonlight was transfigured. One might have paired him

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with that well-known and universally admired triumph, "The Soul's Awakening," so sweet was his ecstasy. And presently with his thirst for revenge glutted by six or seven violent assaults, a duel and two vigorous murders, his mind came round to the Young Lady in Grey again.

She was a plucky one too. He went over the incident the barmaid at the Angel had described to him. His thoughts ceased to be a torrent, smoothed down to a mirror in which she was reflected with infinite clearness and detail. He'd never met anything like her before. Fancy that bolster of a barmaid being dressed in that way! He whuffed a contemptuous laugh. He compared her colour, her vigour, her voice, with the Young Ladies in Business with whom his lot had been cast. Even in tears she was beautiful, more beautiful indeed to him, for it made her seem softer and weaker, more accessible. And such weeping as he had seen before had been so much a matter of damp white faces, red noses, and hair coming out of curl. Your draper's assistant becomes something of a judge of weeping, because weeping is the custom of all Young Ladies in Business, when for any reason their services are dispensed with. She could weep—and (by Gosh!) she could smile. *He* knew that, and reverting to acting abruptly, he smiled confidentially at the puckered pallor of the moon.

It is difficult to say how long Mr. Hoopdriver's pensiveness lasted. It seemed a long time before his thoughts of action returned. Then he remembered he was a "watcher"; that to-morrow he must be busy. It would be in character to make notes, and he pulled

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out his little notebook. With that in hand he fell a-thinking again. Would that chap tell her the 'tecks were after them? If so, would she be as anxious to get away as *he* was? He must be on the alert. If possible he must speak to her. Just a significant word, "Your friend—trust me!"—It occurred to him that to-morrow these fugitives might rise early to escape. At that he thought of the time and found it was half-past eleven. "Lord!" said he, "I must see that I wake." He yawned and rose. The blind was up, and he pulled back the chints curtains to let the sunlight strike across to the bed, hung his watch within good view of his pillow, on a nail that supported a kettle-holder, and sat down on his bed to undress. He lay awake for a while thinking of the wonderful possibilities of the morrow, and thence he passed gloriously into the wonderland of dreams.

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XX

AND now to tell of Mr. Hoopdriver, rising with the sun, vigilant, active, wonderful, the practicable half of the lead-framed window stuck open, ears alert, an eye flickering incessantly in the corner panes, in oblique glances at the Angel front. Mrs. Wardor wanted him to have his breakfast downstairs in her kitchen, but that would have meant abandoning the watch, and he held out strongly. The bicycle, *cap-à-pie*, occupied, under protest, a strategic position in the shop. He was expectant by six in the morning. By nine horrible fears oppressed him that his quest had escaped him, and he had to reconnoitre the Angel yard in order to satisfy himself. There he found the ostler (How are the mighty fallen in these decadent days!) brushing down the bicycles of the chase, and he returned relieved to Mrs. Wardor's premises. And about ten they emerged, and rode quietly up the North Street. He watched them until they turned the corner of the post office, and then out into the road and up after them in fine style! They went by the engine-house where the old stocks and the whipping posts are, and on to the Chichester road, and he followed gallantly. So this great chase began.

They did not look round, and he kept them just within sight, getting down if he chanced to draw closely upon them round a corner. By riding vigorously he kept quite conveniently near them, for they

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made no hurry. He grew hot indeed, and his knees were a little stiff to begin with, but that was all. There was small danger of losing them, for a thin chalky dust lay upon the road, and the track of her tire was milled like a shilling and his was a chequered ribbon along the way. So they rode by Cobden's monument and through the prettiest of villages, until at last the Downs rose steeply ahead. There they stopped awhile at the only inn in the place, and Mr. Hoopdriver took up a position which commanded the inn door, and mopped his face and thirsted and smoked a Red Herring cigarette. They remained in the inn for some time. A number of chubby innocents returning home from school, stopped and formed a line in front of him, and watched him quietly but firmly for the space of ten minutes or so. "Go away," said he, and they only seemed more interested. He asked them all their names then, and they answered indistinct murmurs. He gave it up at last and became passive on his gate, and so at length they tired of him.

The couple under observation occupied the inn so long that Mr. Hoopdriver at the thought of their possible employment hungered as well as thirsted. Clearly, they were lunching. It was a cloudless day, and the sun at the meridian beat down upon the top of Mr. Hoopdriver's head, a shower bath of sunshine, a huge jet of hot light. It made his head swim. At last they emerged, and the other man in brown looked back and saw him. They rode on to the foot of the down, and dismounting began to push tediously up that long nearly vertical ascent of blinding white

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road. Mr. Hoopdriver hesitated. It might take them twenty minutes to mount that. Beyond was empty downland perhaps for miles. He decided to return to the inn and snatch a hasty meal.

At the inn they gave him biscuits and cheese and a misleading pewter measure of sturdy ale, pleasant under the palate, cool in the throat, but leaden in the legs of a hot afternoon. He felt a man of substance as he emerged in the blinding sunshine, but even by the foot of the down the sun was insisting again that his skull was too small for his brains. The hill had got steeper, the chalky road blazed like a magnesium light, and his front wheel began an apparently incurable squeaking. He felt as a man from Mars would feel if he were suddenly transferred to this planet, about three times as heavy as he was wont to feel. The two minute black figures had vanished over the forehead of the hill. "The tracks'll be all right," said Mr. Hoopdriver.

That was a comforting reflection. It not only justified a slow progress up the hill, but at the crest a sprawl on the turf beside the road, to contemplate the Weald from the south. In a matter of two days he had crossed that spacious valley, with its frozen surge of green hills, its snug villages and townships here and there, its copses and corn fields, its ponds and streams like jewellery of diamonds and silver glittering in the sun. The North Downs were hidden far away beyond the Wealden Heights. Down below was the little village of Cocking, and half-way up the hill, a mile perhaps to the right, hung a flock of sheep grazing together. Overhead an anxious peewit circled

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against the blue, and every now and then emitted its feeble cry. Up here the heat was tempered by a pleasant breeze. Mr. Hoopdriver was possessed by unreasonable contentment; he lit himself a cigarette and lounged more comfortably. Surely the Sussex ale is made of the waters of Lethe, of poppies and pleasant dreams. Drowsiness coiled insidiously about him.

He awoke with a guilty start, to find himself sprawling prone on the turf with his cap over one eye. He sat up, rubbed his eyes, and realised that he had slept. His head was still a trifle heavy. And the chase? He jumped to his feet and stooped to pick up his overturned machine. He whipped out his watch and saw that it was past two o'clock. "Lord love us, fancy that!—But the tracks'll be all right," said Mr. Hoopdriver, wheeling his machine back to the chalky road. "I must scorch till I overtake them."

He mounted and rode as rapidly as the heat and a lingering lassitude permitted. Now and then he had to dismount to examine the surface where the road forked. He enjoyed that rather. "Trackin'," he said aloud, and decided in the privacy of his own mind that he had a wonderful instinct for "spoor." So he came past Goodwood station and Lavant, and approached Chichester towards four o'clock. And then came a terrible thing. In places the road became hard, in places were the crowded indentations of a recent flock of sheep, and at last in the throat of the town cobbles; and the stony streets branching east, west, north, and south, at a stone cross under the

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shadow of the cathedral the tracks vanished. "O Crikey!" said Mr. Hoopdriver, dismounting in dismay and standing agape. "Dropped anything?" said an inhabitant at the curb. "Yes," said Mr. Hoopdriver, "I've lost the spoor," and walked upon his way, leaving the inhabitant marvelling what part of a bicycle a spoor might be. Mr. Hoopdriver, abandoning tracking, began asking people if they had seen a Young Lady in Grey on a bicycle. Six casual people hadn't, and he began to feel the inquiry was conspicuous, and desisted. But what was to be done?

Hoopdriver was hot, tired, and hungry, and full of the first gnawings of a monstrous remorse. He decided to get himself some tea and meat, and in the Royal George he meditated over the business in a melancholy frame enough. They had passed out of his world—vanished, and all his wonderful dreams of some vague, crucial interference collapsed like a castle of cards. What a fool he had been not to stick to them like a leech! He might have thought! But there!—what *was* the good of that sort of thing now? He thought of her tears, of her helplessness, of the bearing of the other man in brown, and his wrath and disappointment surged higher. "What *can* I do?" said Mr. Hoopdriver aloud, bringing his fist down beside the teapot.

What would Sherlock Holmes have done? Perhaps, after all, there might be such things as clues in the world, albeit the age of miracles was past. But to look for a clue in this intricate network of cobbled streets, to examine every muddy interstice! There was a chance by looking about and inquiry at the

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various inns. Upon that he began. But of course they might have ridden straight through and scarcely a soul have marked them. And then came a positively brilliant idea. "'Ow many ways are there out of Chichester?" said Mr. Hoopdriver. It was really equal to Sherlock Holmes—that. "If they've made tracks, I shall find those tracks. If not—they're in the town." He was then in East Street, and he started at once to make the circuit of the place, discovering incidentally that Chichester is a walled city. In passing, he made inquiries at the Black Swan, the Crown, and the Red Lion Hotel. At six o'clock in the evening, he was walking downcast, intent, as one who had dropped money, along the road towards Bognor, kicking up the dust with his shoes and fretting with disappointed pugnacity. A thwarted, crestfallen Hoopdriver it was, as you may well imagine. And then suddenly there jumped upon his attention—a broad line ribbed like a shilling, and close beside it one chequered, that ever and again split into two. "Found!" said Mr. Hoopdriver and swung round on his heel at once, and back to the Royal George, helter skelter, for the bicycle they were minding for him. The ostler thought he was confoundedly imperious, considering his machine.

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XXI

THAT seductive gentleman, Bechamel, had been working up to a crisis. He had started upon this elopement in a vein of fine romance, immensely proud of his wickedness, and really as much in love as an artificial oversoul can be, with Jessie. But either she was the profoundest of coquettes or she had not the slightest element of Passion (with a large P) in her composition. It warred with all his ideas of himself and the feminine mind to think that under their flattering circumstances she really could be so vitally deficient. He found her persistent coolness, her more or less evident contempt for himself, exasperating in the highest degree. He put it to himself that she was enough to provoke a saint, and tried to think that was piquant and enjoyable, but the blisters on his vanity asserted themselves. The fact is, he was, under this standing irritation, getting down to the natural man in himself for once, and the natural man in himself, in spite of Oxford and the Junior Reviewers' Club, was a Palæolithic creature of simple tastes and violent methods. "I'll be level with you yet," ran like a plough through the soil of his thoughts.

Then there was this infernal detective. Bechamel had told his wife he was going to Davos to see Carter. To that he had fancied she was reconciled, but how she would take this exploit was entirely problem-

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atical. She was a woman of peculiar moral views, and she measured marital infidelity largely by its proximity to herself. Out of her sight, and more particularly out of the sight of the other women of her set, vice of the recognised description was, perhaps, permissible to those contemptible weaklings, men, but this was Evil on the High Roads. She was bound to make a fuss, and these fusses invariably took the final form of a tightness of money for Bechamel. Albeit, and he felt it was heroic of him to resolve so, it was worth doing if it was to be done. His imagination worked on a kind of matronly Valkyrie, and the noise of pursuit and vengeance was in the air. The idyll still had the front of the stage. That accursed detective, it seemed, had been thrown off the scent, and that, at any rate, gave a night's respite. But things must be brought to an issue forthwith.

By eight o'clock in the evening, in a little dining-room in the Vicuna Hotel, Bognor, the crisis had come, and Jessie, flushed and angry in the face and with her heart sinking, faced him again for her last struggle with him. He had tricked her this time effectually, and luck had been on his side. She was booked as Mrs. Beaumont. Save for her refusal to enter their room, and her eccentricity of eating with unwashed hands, she had so far kept up the appearances of things before the waiter. But the dinner was grim enough. Now in turn she appealed to his better nature and made extravagant statements of her plans to fool him.

He was white and vicious by this time, and his

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anger quivered through his pose of brilliant wickedness.

"I will go to the station," she said. "I will go back——"

"The last train for anywhere leaves at 7.42."

"I will appeal to the police——"

"You don't know them."

"I will tell these hotel people."

"They will turn you out of doors. You're in such a thoroughly false position now. They don't understand—unconventionality, down here."

She stamped her foot. "If I wander about the streets all night—" she said.

"You who have never been out alone after dusk? Do you know what the streets of a charming little holiday resort are like——?"

"I don't care," she said. "I can go to the clergyman here."

"He's a charming man. Unmarried. And men are really more alike than you think. And anyhow——"

"Well?"

"How *can* you explain the last two nights to any one now? The mischief is done, Jessie."

"You *cur*," she said, and suddenly put her hand to her breast. He thought she meant to faint, but she stood, with the colour gone from her face.

"No," he said. "I love you."

"Love!" said she.

"Yes—love."

"There are ways yet," she said, after a pause.

"Not for you. You are too full of life and hope yet for, what is it?—not the dark arch nor the black

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flowing river. Don't you think of it. You'll only shirk it when the moment comes, and turn it all into comedy."

She turned round abruptly from him and stood looking out across the parade at the shining sea over which the afterglow of day fled before the rising moon. He maintained his attitude. The blinds were still up, for she had told the waiter not to draw them. There was silence for some moments.

At last he spoke in as persuasive a voice as he could summon. "Take it sensibly, Jessie. Why should we, who have so much in common, quarrel into melodrama? I swear I love you. You are all that is bright and desirable to me. I am stronger than you, older; man to your woman. To find *you* too—conventional!"

She looked at him over her shoulder, and he noticed with a twinge of delight how her little chin came out beneath the curve of her cheek.

"*Man!*" she said. "Man to *my* woman! Do *men* lie? Would a *man* use his five and thirty years' experience to outwit a girl of seventeen? Man to my woman indeed! That surely is the last insult!"

"Your repartee is admirable, Jessie. I should say they do, though—all that and more also when their hearts were set on such a girl as yourself. For God's sake drop this shrewishness! Why should you be so—difficult to me? Here am I with *my* reputation, *my* career, at your feet. Look here, Jessie—on my honour, I will marry you——"

"God forbid," she said, so promptly that she never learned he had a wife, even then. It occurred to him

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then for the first time, in the flash of her retort, that she did not know he was married.

"'Tis only a pre-nuptial settlement," he said, following that hint.

He paused.

"You must be sensible. The thing's your own doing. Come out on the beach now—the beach here is splendid, and the moon will soon be high."

"*I won't*," she said, stamping her foot.

"Well, well——"

"Oh! leave me alone. Let me think——"

"Think," he said, "if you want to. It's your cry always. But you can't save yourself by thinking, my dear girl. You can't save yourself in any way now. If saving it is—this parsimony——"

"Oh, go—go."

"Very well. I will go. I will go and smoke a cigar. And think of you, dear. . . . But do you think I should do all this if I did not care?"

"Go," she whispered, without glancing round. She continued to stare out of the window. He stood looking at her for a moment, with a strange light in his eyes. He made a step towards her. "*I have you*," he said. "You are mine. Netted—caught. But mine." He would have gone up to her and laid his hand upon her, but he did not dare to do that yet. "I have you in my hand," he said, "in my power. Do you hear—*Power!*"

She remained impassive. He stared at her for half a minute, and then, with a superb gesture that was lost upon her, went to the door. Surely the instinctive abasement of her sex before Strength was upon

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his side. He told himself that his battle was won. She heard the handle move and the catch click as the door closed behind him.

XXII

AND now without in the twilight behold Mr. Hoopdriver, his cheeks hot, his eyes bright! His brain is in a tumult. The nervous, obsequious Hoopdriver, to whom I introduced you some days since, has undergone a wonderful change. Ever since he lost that "spoor" in Chichester, he has been tormented by the most horrible visions of the shameful insults that may be happening. The strangeness of new surroundings has been working to strip off the habitual servile from him. Here was moonlight rising over the memory of a red sunset, dark shadows and glowing orange lamps, beauty somewhere mysteriously rapt away from him, tangible wrong in a brown suit and an unpleasant face, flouting him. Mr. Hoopdriver for the time was in the world of Romance and Knight-errantry, divinely forgetful of his social position or hers; forgetting, too, for the time any of the wretched timidities that had tied him long since behind the counter in his proper place. He was angry and adventurous. It was all about him, this vivid drama he had fallen into, and it was eluding him. He was far too grimly in earnest to pick up that lost thread and make a play of it now. The man was living. He did not pose when he alighted at the Coffee Tavern even, nor when he made his hasty meal.

As Bechamel crossed from the Vicuna towards the

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esplanade, Hoopdriver, disappointed and exasperated, came hurrying round the corner from the Temperance Hotel. At the sight of Bechamel, his heart jumped, and the tension of his angry suspense exploded into, rather than gave place to, an excited activity of mind. They were at the Vicuna, and she was there now alone. It was the occasion he sought. But he would give Chance no chance against him. He went back round the corner, sat down on the seat, and watched Bechamel recede into the dimness up the esplanade, before he got up and walked into the hotel entrance. "A lady cyclist in grey," he asked for, and followed boldly on the waiter's heels. The door of the dining-room was opening before he felt a qualm. And then suddenly he was nearly minded to turn and run for it, and his features seemed to him to be convulsed.

She turned with a start, and looked at him with something between terror and hope in her eyes.

"Can I—have a few words—with you, alone?" said Mr. Hoopdriver, controlling his breath with difficulty. She hesitated, and then motioned the waiter to withdraw.

Mr. Hoopdriver watched the door shut. He had intended to step out into the middle of the room, fold his arms and say, "You are in trouble. I am a Friend. Trust me." Instead of which he stood panting and then spoke with sudden familiarity, hastily, guiltily: "Look here. I don't know what the Juice is up, but I think there's something wrong. Excuse my intruding—if it isn't so. I'll do anything you like to help you out of the scrape—if

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you're in one. That's my meaning, I believe. What can I do? I would do anything to help you."

Her brow puckered, as she watched him make, with infinite emotion, this remarkable speech. "You!" she said. She was tumultuously weighing possibilities in her mind, and he had scarcely ceased when she had made her resolve.

She stepped a pace forward. "You are a gentleman," she said.

"Yes," said Mr. Hoopdriver.

"Can I trust you?"

She did not wait for his assurance. "I must leave this hotel at once. Come here."

She took his arm and led him to the window. "You can just see the gate. It is still open. Through that are our bicycles. Go down, get them out, and I will come down to you. Dare you?"

"Get your bicycle out in the road?"

"Both. Mine alone is no good. At once. Dare you?"

"Which way?"

"Go out by the front door and round. I will follow in one minute."

"Right!" said Mr. Hoopdriver, and went.

He had to get those bicycles. Had he been told to go out and kill Bechamel he would have done it. His head was a Maelstrom now. He walked out of the hotel, along the front, and into the big, black-shadowed coach yard. He looked round. There were no bicycles visible. Then a man emerged from the dark, a short man in a short, black, shiny jacket. Hoopdriver was caught. He made no at-

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tempt to turn and run for it. "I've been giving your machines a wipe over, sir," said the man, recognising the suit, and touching his cap. Hoopdriver's intelligence now was a soaring eagle; he swooped on the situation at once. "That's right," he said, and added, before the pause became marked, "Where is mine? I want to look at the chain."

The man led him into an open shed, and went fumbling for a lantern. Hoopdriver moved the lady's machine out of his way to the door, and then laid hands on the man's machine and wheeled it out of the shed into the yard. The gate stood open and beyond was the pale road and a clump of trees black in the twilight. He stooped and examined the chain with trembling fingers. How was it to be done? Something behind the gate seemed to flutter. The man must be got rid of anyhow.

"I say," said Hoopdriver, with an inspiration, "can you get me a screwdriver?"

The man simply walked across the shed, opened and shut a box, and came up to the kneeling Hoopdriver with a screwdriver in his hand. Hoopdriver felt himself a lost man. He took the screwdriver with a tepid "Thanks," and incontinently had another inspiration.

"I say," he said again.

"Well?"

"This is Miles too big."

The man lit the lantern, brought it up to Hoopdriver and put it down on the ground. "Want a smaller screwdriver?" he said.

Hoopdriver had his handkerchief out and sneezed

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a prompt *atichew*. It is the orthodox thing when you wish to avoid recognition. "As small as you have," he said, out of his pocket handkerchief.

"I ain't got none smaller than that," said the ostler.

"Won't do, really," said Hoopdriver, still wallowing in his handkerchief.

"I'll see wot they got in the 'ouse, if you like, sir," said the man. "If you would," said Hoopdriver. And as the man's heavily nailed boots went clattering down the yard, Hoopdriver stood up, took a noiseless step to the lady's machine, laid trembling hands on its handle and saddle, and prepared for a rush.

The scullery door opened momentarily and sent a beam of warm, yellow light up the road, shut again behind the man, and forthwith Hoopdriver rushed the machines towards the gate. A dark grey form came fluttering to meet him. "Give me this," she said, "and bring yours."

He passed the thing to her, touched her hand in the darkness, ran back, seized Bechamel's machine, and followed.

The yellow light of the scullery door suddenly flashed upon the cobbles again. It was too late now to do anything but escape. He heard the ostler shout behind him, and came into the road. She was up and dim already. He got into the saddle without a blunder. In a moment the ostler was in the gateway with a full-throated "*Hi!* sir! That ain't allowed;" and Hoopdriver was overtaking the Young Lady in Grey. The machine ran with astound-

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ing ease. For some moments the earth seemed alive with shouts of "Stop 'em!" and the shadows with ambuscades of police. The road swept round, and they were riding out of sight of the hotel, and behind dark hedges, side by side.

She was weeping with excitement as he overtook her. "Brave," she said, "brave!" and he ceased to feel like a hunted thief. He looked over his shoulder and about him, and saw that they were already out of Bognor—for the Vicuna stands at the very westernmost extremity of the sea front—and riding on a fair wide road.

XXIII

THE ostler (being a fool) rushed violently down the road vociferating after them. Then he returned panting to the Vicuna Hotel, and finding a group of men outside the entrance, who wanted to know what was *up*, stopped to give them the cream of the adventure. That gave the fugitives five minutes. Then pushing breathlessly into the bar, he had to make it clear to the barmaid what the matter was, and the "gov'nor" being out, they spent some more precious time wondering "what—*ever*" was to be done! in which the two customers returning from outside joined with animation. There were also moral remarks and other irrelevant contributions. There were conflicting ideas of telling the police and pursuing the flying couple on a horse. That made ten minutes. Then Stephen, the waiter, who had shown Hoopdriver up, came down and lit wonderful lights and started quite a fresh discussion by the simple

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question "*Which?*" That turned ten minutes into a quarter of an hour. And in the midst of this discussion, making a sudden and awe-stricken silence, appeared Bechamel in the hall beyond the bar, walked with a resolute air to the foot of the staircase, and passed out of sight. You conceive the backward pitch of that exceptionally shaped cranium? Incredible eyes stared into one another's in the bar, as his paces, muffled by the stair carpet, went up to the landing, turned, reached the passage and walked into the dining-room overhead.

"It wasn't that one at all, miss," said the ostler, "I'd *swear*."

"Well, that's Mr. Beaumont," said the barmaid, "—anyhow."

Their conversation hung comatose in the air, switched up by Bechamel. They listened together. His feet stopped. Turned. Went out of the dining-room. Down the passage to the bedroom. Stopped again.

"Poor chap!" said the barmaid. "She's a wicked woman!"

"Sssh!" said Stephen.

After a pause Bechamel went back to the dining-room. They heard a chair creak under him. Interlude of conversational eyebrows.

"I'm going up," said Stephen, "to break the melancholy news to him."

Bechamel looked up from a week-old newspaper as, without knocking, Stephen entered. Bechamel's face suggested a different expectation. "Beg pardon, sir," said Stephen, with a diplomatic cough.

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“Well?” said Bechamel, wondering suddenly if Jessie had kept some of her threats. If so, he was in for an explanation. But he had it ready. She was a monomaniac. “Leave me alone with her,” he would say; “I know how to calm her.”

“Mrs. Beaumont,” said Stephen.

“*Well?*”

“Has gone.”

He rose with a fine surprise. “Gone!” he said with a half laugh.

“Gone, sir. On her bicycle.”

“On her bicycle! Why?”

“She went, sir, with Another Gentleman.”

This time Bechamel was really startled. “An—other Gentleman! *Who?*”

“Another gentleman in brown, sir. Went into the yard, sir, got out the two bicycles, sir, and went off, sir—about twenty minutes ago.”

Bechamel stood with his eyes round and his knuckles on his hips. Stephen, watching him with immense enjoyment, speculated whether this abandoned husband would weep or curse, or rush off at once in furious pursuit. But as yet he seemed merely stunned.

“Brown clothes?” he said. “And fairish?”

“A little like yourself, sir,—in the dark. The ostler, sir, Jim Duke——”

Bechamel laughed awry. Then with infinite fervour he said—but let us put in blank cartridge—he said, “—— ——!”

“I might have thought!”

He flung himself into the arm-chair.

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"Damn her," said Bechamel, for all the world like a common man. "I'll chuck this infernal business! They've gone, eigh?"

"Yessir."

"Well, let 'em go," said Bechamel, making a memorable saying. "Let 'em go. Who cares? And I wish him luck. And bring me some Bourbon as fast as you can, there's a good chap. I'll take that, and then I'll have another look round Bognor before I turn in."

Stephen was too surprised to say anything but "Bourbon, sir?"

"Go on," said Bechamel. "Damn you!"

Stephen's sympathies changed at once. "Yessir," he murmured, fumbling for the door handle, and left the room marvelling. Bechamel, having in this way satisfied his sense of appearances and comported himself as a Pagan should, so soon as the waiter's footsteps had passed, vented the cream of his feelings in a stream of blasphemous indecency. Whether his wife or *her* stepmother had sent the detective, *she* had evidently gone off with him, and that little business was over. And he was here, stranded and sold, an ass, and as it were, the son of many generations of asses. And his only ray of hope was that it seemed more probable, after all, that the girl had escaped through her stepmother. In which case the business might be hushed up yet, and the evil hour of explanation with his wife indefinitely postponed. Then abruptly the image of that lithe figure in grey knickerbockers went frisking across his mind again, and he reverted to his blasphemies. He started up in a

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gusty frenzy with a vague idea of pursuit, and incontinently sat down again with a concussion that stirred the bar below to its depths. He banged the arms of the chair with his fists, and swore again. "Of all the accursed fools that were ever spawned," he was chanting, "I, Bechamel—" when with an abrupt tap and prompt opening of the door, Stephen entered with the Bourbon.

THE MOONLIGHT RIDE

XXIV

AND so the twenty minutes' law passed into an infinity. We leave the wicked Bechamel clothing himself with cursing as with a garment,—the wretched creature has already sufficiently sullied our modest but truthful pages,—we leave the eager little group in the bar of the Vicuna Hotel, we leave all Bognor as we have left all Chichester and Midhurst and Haslemere and Guildford and Ripley and Putney, and follow this dear fool of a Hoopdriver of ours and his Young Lady in Grey out upon the moonlit road. How they rode! How their hearts beat together and their breath came fast, and how every shadow was anticipation and every noise pursuit! For all that flight Mr. Hoopdriver was in the world of Romance. Had a policeman intervened because their lamps were not lit, Hoopdriver had cut him down and ridden on after the fashion of a hero born. Had Bechamel arisen in the way with rapiers for a duel, Hoopdriver had fought as one to whom Agincourt was a reality and drapery a dream. It was Rescue, Elopement, Glory! And she by the side of him! He had seen her face in shadow, with the morning sunlight tangled in her hair, he had seen her sympathetic with that warm light in her face, he had seen her troubled and her eyes bright with tears. But what light is there lighting a face like hers, to compare with the soft glamour of the midsummer moon?

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The road turned northward, going round through the outskirts of Bognor, in one place dark and heavy under a thick growth of trees, then amidst villas again, some warm and lamplit, some white and sleeping in the moonlight; then between hedges, over which they saw broad wan meadows shrouded in a low-lying mist. They scarcely heeded whither they rode at first, being only anxious to get away, turning once westward when the spire of Chichester cathedral rose suddenly near them out of the dewy night, pale and intricate and high. They rode, speaking little, just a rare word now and then at a turning, at a footfall, at a roughness in the road.

She seemed to be too intent upon escape to give much thought to him, but after the first tumult of the adventure, as flight passed into mere steady riding, his mind became an enormous appreciation of the position. The night was a warm white silence save for the subtle running of their chains. He looked sideways at her as she sat beside him with her ankles gracefully ruling the treadles. Now the road turned westward, and she was a dark grey outline against the shimmer of the moon; and now they faced northwards, and the soft cold light passed caressingly over her hair and touched her brow and cheek.

There is a magic quality in moonshine; it touches all that is sweet and beautiful, and the rest of the night is hidden. It has created the fairies, whom the sunlight kills, and fairyland rises again in our hearts at the sight of it, the voices of the filmy rout, and their faint, soul-piercing melodies. By the moonlight

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every man, dull clod though he be by day, tastes something of Endymion, takes something of the youth and strength of Endymion, and sees the dear white goddess shining at him from his Lady's eyes. The firm substantial daylight things become ghostly and elusive, the hills beyond are a sea of unsubstantial texture, the world a visible spirit, the spiritual within us rises out of its darkness, loses something of its weight and body, and swims up towards heaven. This road that was a mere rutted white dust, hot underfoot, blinding to the eye, is now a soft grey silence, with the glitter of a crystal grain set starlike in its silver here and there. Overhead, riding serenely through the spacious blue, is the mother of the silence, she who has spiritualised the world, alone save for two attendant steady shining stars. And in silence under her benign influence, under the benediction of her light, rode our two wanderers side by side through the transfigured and transfiguring night.

Nowhere was the moon shining quite so brightly as in Mr. Hoopdriver's skull. At the turnings of the road he made his decisions with an air of profound promptitude (and quite haphazard). "The Right," he would say. Or again "The Left," as one who knew. So it was that in the space of an hour they came abruptly down a little lane, full tilt upon the sea. Grey beach to the right of them and to the left, and a little white cottage fast asleep inland of a sleeping fishing-boat. "'Ullo!" said Mr. Hoopdriver, *sotto voce*. They dismounted abruptly. Stunted oaks and thorns rose out of the haze of moonlight that was tangled in the hedge on either side.

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"You are safe," said Mr. Hoopdriver, sweeping off his cap with an air and bowing courtly.

"Where are we?"

"*Safe.*"

"But *where?*"

"Chichester Harbour." He waved his arm seaward as though it was a goal.

"Do you think they will follow us?"

"We have turned and turned again."

It seemed to Hoopdriver that he heard her sob. She stood dimly there, holding her machine, and he, holding his, could go no nearer to her to see if she sobbed for weeping or for want of breath. "What are we to do now?" her voice asked.

"Are you tired?" he asked.

"I will do what has to be done."

The two black figures in the broken light were silent for a space. "Do you know," she said, "I am not afraid of you. I am sure you are honest to me. And I do not even know your name!"

He was taken with a sudden shame of his homely patronymic. "It's an ugly name," he said. "But you are right in trusting me. I would—I would do anything for you. . . . This is nothing."

She caught at her breath. She did not care to ask why. But compared with Bechamel!—"We take each other on trust," she said. "Do you want to know—how things are with me?"

"That man," she went on, after the assent of his listening silence, "promised to help and protect me. I was unhappy at home—never mind why. A step-mother—idle, unoccupied, hindered, cramped, that

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is enough, perhaps. Then he came into my life, and talked to me of art and literature, and set my brain on fire. I wanted to come out into the world, to be a human being—not a thing in a hutch. And he——”

“I know,” said Hoopdriver.

“And now, here I am——”

“I will do anything,” said Hoopdriver.

She thought. “You cannot imagine my step-mother. No! I could not describe her——”

“I am entirely at your service. I will help you with all my power.”

“I have lost an Illusion and found a Knight-errant.” She spoke of Bechamel as the Illusion.

Mr. Hoopdriver felt flattered. But he had no adequate answer.

“I’m thinking,” he said, full of a rapture of protective responsibility, “what we had best be doing. You are tired, you know. And we can’t wander all night—after the day we’ve had.”

“That was Chichester we were near?” she asked.

“If,” he meditated, with a tremble in his voice, “you would make *me* your brother, *Miss Beaumont*.”

“Yes?”

“We could stop there together——”

She took a minute to answer. “I am going to light these lamps,” said Hoopdriver. He bent down to his own, and struck a match on his shoe. She looked at his face in its light, grave and intent. How could she ever have thought him common or absurd?

“But you must tell me your name—brother,” she said.

“Er—Carrington,” said Mr. Hoopdriver, after a

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momentary pause. Who would be Hoopdriver on a night like this?

“But the Christian name?”

“Christian name? *My* Christian name. Well—Chris.” He snapped his lamp and stood up. “If you will hold my machine, I will light yours,” he said.

She came round obediently and took his machine, and for a moment they stood face to face. “My name, brother Chris,” she said, “is Jessie.”

He looked into her eyes, and his excitement seemed arrested. “*Jessie*,” he repeated slowly. The mute emotion of his face affected her strangely. She had to speak. “It’s not such a very wonderful name, is it?” she said, with a laugh to break the intensity.

He opened his mouth and shut it again, and, with a sudden wincing of his features, abruptly turned and bent down to open the lantern in front of her machine. She looked down at him, almost kneeling in front of her, with an unreasonable approbation in her eyes. It was, as I have indicated, the hour and season of the full moon.

XXV

MR. HOOPDRIVER conducted the rest of that night’s journey with the same confident dignity as before, and it was chiefly by good luck and the fact that most roads about a town converge thereupon, that Chichester was at last attained. It seemed at first as though every one had gone to bed, but the Red Hotel still glowed yellow and warm. It was the first time Hoopdriver had dared the mysteries of a “first-class”

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hotel. But that night he was in the mood to dare anything.

“So you found your Young Lady at last,” said the ostler of the Red Hotel; for it chanced he was one of those of whom Hoopdriver had made inquiries in the afternoon.

“Quite a misunderstanding,” said Hoopdriver, with splendid readiness. “My sister had gone to Bognor. But I brought her back here. I’ve took a fancy to this place. And the moonlight’s simply dee-vine.

“We’ve had supper, thenks, and we’re tired,” said Mr. Hoopdriver. “I suppose you won’t take anything,—Jessie?”

The glory of having her, even as a sister! and to call her Jessie like that! But he carried it off splendidly, as he felt himself bound to admit. “Good-night, Sis,” he said, “and pleasant dreams. I’ll just ’ave a look at this paper before I turn in.” But this was living indeed! he told himself.

So gallantly did Mr. Hoopdriver comport himself up to the very edge of the Most Wonderful Day of all. It had begun early, you will remember, with a vigil in a little sweetstuff shop next door to the Angel at Midhurst. But to think of all the things that had happened since then! He caught himself in the middle of a yawn, pulled out his watch, saw the time was half-past eleven, and marched off, with a fine sense of heroism, bedward.

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XXVI

AND here, thanks to the glorious institution of sleep, comes a break in the narrative again. These absurd young people are safely tucked away now, their heads full of glowing nonsense, indeed, but the course of events at any rate is safe from any fresh developments through their activities for the next eight hours or more. They are both sleeping healthily, you will perhaps be astonished to hear. Here is this girl—what girls are coming to nowadays only Mrs. Lynn Linton can tell!—in company with an absolute stranger, of low extraction and uncertain accent, unchaperoned and unabashed; indeed now she fancies she is safe, she is, if anything, a little proud of her own share in these transactions. Then this Mr. Hoopdriver of yours, roseate idiot that he is! is in illegal possession of a stolen bicycle, a stolen young lady, and two stolen names, established with them in an hotel that is quite beyond his means, and immensely proud of himself in a somnolent way for these incomparable follies. There are occasions when a moralising novelist can merely wring his hands and leave matters to take their course. For all Hoopdriver knows or cares he may be locked up the very first thing to-morrow morning for the rape of the cycle. Then in Bognor, let alone that melancholy vestige Bechamel (with

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whom our dealings are, thank Goodness! over), there is a Coffee Tavern with a steak Mr. Hoopdriver ordered, done to a cinder long ago, his American-cloth parcel in a bedroom, and his own proper bicycle, by way of guarantee, carefully locked up in the hayloft. To-morrow he will be a Mystery, and they will be looking for his body along the sea front. And so far we have never given a glance at the desolate home in Surbiton, familiar to you no doubt through the medium of illustrated interviews, where the unhappy stepmother——

That stepmother, it must be explained, is quite well known to you. That is a little surprise I have prepared for you. She is "Thomas Plantagenet," the gifted authoress of that witty and daring book, "A Soul Untrammelled," and quite an excellent woman in her way,—only it is such a crooked way. Her real name is Milton. She is a widow and a charming one, only fifteen years older than Jessie, and she is always careful to dedicate her more daring works to the "sacred memory of my husband" to show that there's nothing personal, you know, in the matter. Considering her literary reputation (she was always speaking of herself as one "martyred for truth," because the critics advertised her written indecorums in column-long "slates"),—considering her literary reputation, I say, she was one of the most respectable women it is possible to imagine. She furnished correctly, dressed correctly, had severe notions of whom she might meet, went to church, and even at times, in some esoteric spirit, took the sacrament. And Jessie she brought up so carefully that she never even

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let her read "A Soul Untrammelled." Which therefore, naturally enough, Jessie did, and went on from that to a feast of advanced literature. Mrs. Milton not only brought up Jessie carefully, but very slowly, so that at seventeen she was still a clever schoolgirl (as you have seen her) and quite in the background of the little literary circle of unimportant celebrities which "Thomas Plantagenet" adorned. Mrs. Milton knew Bechamel's reputation of being a dangerous man; but then bad men are not bad women, and she let him come to her house to show she was not afraid—she took no account of Jessie. When the elopement came, therefore, it was a double disappointment to her, for she perceived his hand by a kind of instinct. She did the correct thing. The correct thing, as you know, is to take hansom cabs regardless of expense, and weep and say you do not know *what* to do, round the circle of your confidential friends. She could not have ridden nor wept more had Jessie been her own daughter—she showed the properest spirit. And she not only showed it, but felt it.

Mrs. Milton, as a successful little authoress and still more successful widow of thirty-two,—“Thomas Plantagenet is a charming woman,” her reviewers used to write invariably, even if they spoke ill of her,—found the steady growth of Jessie into womanhood an unmitigated nuisance and had been willing enough to keep her in the background. And Jessie—who had started their intercourse at fourteen with abstract objections to stepmothers—had been active enough in resenting this. Increasing rivalry and

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antagonism had sprung up between them, until they could engender quite a vivid hatred from a dropped hairpin or the cutting of a book with a sharpened knife. There is very little deliberate wickedness in the world. The stupidity of our selfishness gives much the same results indeed, but in the ethical laboratory it shows a different nature. And when the disaster came, Mrs. Milton's remorse for their gradual loss of sympathy and her share in the losing of it, was genuine enough.

You may imagine the comfort she got from her friends, and how West Kensington and Notting Hill and Hampstead, the literary suburbs, those decent penitentiaries of a once Bohemian calling, hummed with the business. Her "Men"—as a charming literary lady she had, of course, an organised corps—were immensely excited; and were sympathetic, helpfully energetic, suggestive, alert, as their ideals of their various dispositions required them to be. "Any news of Jessie?" was the pathetic opening of a dozen melancholy but interesting conversations. To her Men she was not perhaps so damp as she was to her women friends, but in a quiet way she was even more touching. For three days, Wednesday that is, Thursday, and Friday, nothing was heard of the fugitives. It was known that Jessie, wearing a patent costume with button-up skirts, and mounted on a diamond frame safety with Dunlops and a loofah covered saddle, had ridden forth early in the morning, taking with her about two pounds seven shillings in money and a grey touring-case packed, and there, save for a brief note to her stepmother,

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—a declaration of independence, it was said, an assertion of her Ego containing extensive and very annoying quotations from “A Soul Untrammelled,” and giving no definite intimation of her plans—knowledge ceased. That note was shown to few, and then only in the strictest confidence.

But on Friday evening late came a breathless Man Friend, Widgery, a correspondent of hers who had heard of her trouble among the first. He had been touring in Sussex,—his knapsack was still on his back,—and he testified hurriedly that at a place called Midhurst, in the bar of an hotel called the Angel, he had heard from a barmaid a vivid account of a Young Lady in Grey. Descriptions tallied. But who was the man in brown? “The poor, misguided girl! I must go to her at once,” she said choking, and rising with her hand to her heart.

“It’s impossible to-night. There are no more trains. I looked on my way.”

“A mother’s love,” she said. “I bear her *that*.”

“I know you do.” He spoke with feeling, for no one admired his photographs of scenery more than Mrs. Milton. “It’s more than she deserves.”

“Oh, don’t speak unkindly of her! She has been misled.”

It was really very friendly of him. He declared he was only sorry his news ended there. Should he follow them, and bring her back? He had come to her because he knew of her anxiety. “It is *good* of you,” she said, and quite instinctively took and pressed his hand. “And to think of that poor girl—to-night! It’s dreadful.” She looked into the

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fire that she had lit when he came in, the warm light fell upon her dark purple dress, and left her features in a warm shadow. She looked such a slight, frail thing to be troubled so. "We must follow her." Her resolution seemed magnificent. "I have no one to go with me."

"He must marry her," said the man.

"She has no friends. We have no one. After all—Two women. So helpless."

And this fair-haired little figure was the woman that people who knew her only from her books, called bold, prurient even! Simply because she was great-hearted—intellectual. He was overcome by the unspeakable pathos of her position.

"Mrs. Milton," he said. "Hetty!"

She glanced at him. The overflow was imminent. "Not now," she said, "not now. I must find her first."

"Yes," he said with intense emotion. (He was one of those big fat men who feel deeply.) "But let me help you. At least let me help you."

"But can you spare time?" she said. "For *me*."

"For you——"

"But what can I do? what can *we* do?"

"Go to Midhurst. Follow her on. Trace her. She was there on Thursday night, last night. She cycled out of the town. Courage!" he said. "We will save her yet!"

She put out her hand and pressed his again.

"Courage!" he repeated, finding it so well received.

There were alarms and excursions without. She

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turned her back to the fire, and he sat down suddenly in the big arm-chair, which suited his dimensions admirably. Then the door opened, and the girl showed in Dangle, who looked curiously from one to the other. There was emotion here; he had heard the arm-chair creaking, and Mrs. Milton, whose face was flushed, displayed a suspicious alacrity to explain. "You, too," she said, "are one of my good friends. And we have news of her at last."

It was decidedly an advantage to Widgery, but Dangle determined to show himself a man of resource. In the end he, too, was accepted for the Midhurst Expedition, to the intense disgust of Widgery; and young Phipps, a callow youth of few words, faultless collars, and fervent devotion, was also enrolled before the evening was out. They would scour the country, all three of them. She appeared to brighten up a little, but it was evident she was profoundly touched. She did not know what she had done to merit such friends. Her voice broke a little, she moved towards the door, and young Phipps, who was a youth of action rather than of words, sprang and opened it—proud to be first.

"She is sorely troubled," said Dangle to Widgery.

"We must do what we can for her."

"She is a wonderful woman," said Dangle. "So subtle, so intricate, so many faceted. She feels this deeply."

Young Phipps said nothing, but he felt the more.

And yet they say the age of chivalry is dead!

But this is only an Interlude, introduced to give our wanderers time to refresh themselves by good

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honest sleeping. For the present, therefore, we will not concern ourselves with the starting of the Rescue Party, nor with Mrs. Milton's simple but becoming grey dress, with the healthy Widgery's Norfolk jacket and thick boots, with the slender Dangle's energetic bearing, nor with the wonderful chequerings that set off the legs of the golf-suited Phipps. They are after us. In a little while they will be upon us. You must imagine as you best can the competitive raidings at Midhurst of Widgery, Dangle, and Phipps. How Widgery was great at questions and Dangle good at inference, and Phipps so conspicuously inferior in everything that he felt it and sulked with Mrs. Milton most of the day, after the manner of your callow youth the whole world over. Mrs. Milton stopped at the Angel and was very sad and charming and intelligent, and Widgery paid the bill. In the afternoon of Saturday, Chichester was attained. But by that time our fugitives— As you shall immediately hear.

THE AWAKENING OF MR. HOOPDRIVER

XXVII

MR. HOOPDRIVER stirred on his pillow, opened his eyes, and, staring unmeaningly, yawned. The bed-clothes were soft and pleasant. He turned the peaked nose that overrides the insufficient moustache, up to the ceiling, a pinkish projection over the billow of white. You might see it wrinkle as he yawned again, and then become quiet. So matters remained for a space. Very slowly recollection returned to him. Then a shock of indeterminate brown hair appeared, and first one watery grey eye a-wondering, and then two; the bed upheaved, and you had him, his thin neck projecting abruptly from the clothes he held about him, his face staring about the room. He held the clothes about him, I hope I may explain, because his night-shirt was at Bognor in an American-cloth packet, derelict. He yawned a third time, rubbed his eyes, smacked his lips. He was recalling almost everything now. The pursuit, the hotel, the tremulous daring of his entry, the swift adventure of the inn yard, the moonlight— Abruptly he threw the clothes back and rose into a sitting position on the edge of the bed. Without was the noise of shutters being unfastened and doors unlocked, and the passing of hoofs and wheels in the street. He looked at his watch. Half-past six. He surveyed the sumptuous room again.

AWAKENING OF MR. HOOPDRIVER

“Lord!” said Mr. Hoopdriver. “It wasn’t a dream, after all.

“I wonder what they charge for these Juicèd rooms!” said Mr. Hoopdriver, nursing one rosy foot.

He became meditative, tugging at his insufficient moustache. Suddenly he gave vent to a noiseless laugh. “What a rush it was! Rushed in and off with his girl right under his nose. Planned it well too. Talk of highway robbery! Talk of brigands! Up and off! Hòw juicèd sold he must be feeling! It was a shave too—in the coach yard!”

Suddenly he became silent. Abruptly his eyebrows rose and his jaw fell. “I sa—a—ay!” said Mr. Hoopdriver.

He had never thought of it before. Perhaps you will understand the whirl he had been in overnight. But one sees things clearer in the daylight. “I’m hanged if I haven’t been and stolen a blessed bicycle.”

“Who cares?” said Mr. Hoopdriver presently, and his face supplied the answer.

Then he thought of the Young Lady in Grey again, and tried to put a more heroic complexion on the business. But of an early morning, on an empty stomach (as with characteristic coarseness, medical men put it) heroics are of a more difficult growth than by moonlight. Everything had seemed exceptionally fine and brilliant, but quite natural, the evening before.

Mr. Hoopdriver reached out his hand, took his Norfolk jacket, laid it over his knees, and took out the money from the little ticket pocket. “Fourteen

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and six-half," he said, holding the coins in his left hand and stroking his chin with his right. He verified, by patting, the presence of a pocketbook in the breast pocket. "Five, fourteen, six-half," said Mr. Hoopdriver. "Left."

With the Norfolk jacket still on his knees, he plunged into another silent meditation. "That wouldn't matter," he said. "It's the bike's the bother.

"No good going back to Bognor.

"Might send it back by carrier, of course. Thanking him for the loan. Having no further use—" Mr. Hoopdriver chuckled and lapsed into the silent concoction of a delightfully impudent letter. "Mr. J. Hoopdriver presents his compliments." But the grave note reasserted itself.

"Might trundle back there in an hour, of course, and exchange them. *My* old crock's so blessed shabby. He's sure to be spiteful too. Have me run in, perhaps. Then she'd be in just the same old fix, only worse. You see, I'm her Knight-errant. It complicates things so."

His eye, wandering loosely, rested on the sponge bath. "What the juice do they want with cream pans in a bedroom?" said Mr. Hoopdriver, *en passant*.

"Best thing we can do is to set out of here as soon as possible, anyhow. I suppose she'll go home to her friends. That bicycle is a juicy nuisance, anyhow. Juicy nuisance!"

He jumped to his feet with a sudden awakening of energy, to proceed with his toilet. Then with a certain horror he remembered that the simple necessities of that process were at Bognor! "Lord!"

AWAKENING OF MR. HOOPDRIVER

he remarked, and whistled silently for a space. "Rummy go! profit and loss; profit, one sister with bicycle complete, wot offers?—cheap for tooth and 'air brush, vests, night-shirt, stockings, and sundries.

"Make the best of it," and presently, when it came to hair-brushing, he had to smooth his troubled locks with his hands. It was a poor result. "Sneak out and get a shave, I suppose, and buy a brush and so on. Chink again! Beard don't show much."

He ran his hand over his chin, looked at himself steadfastly for some time, and curled up his insufficient moustache with some care. Then he fell a-meditating on his beauty. He considered himself, three-quarter face, left and right. An expression of distaste crept over his features. "Looking won't alter it, Hoopdriver," he remarked. "You're a weedy customer, my man. Shoulders narrow. Skimpy, anyhow."

He put his knuckles on the toilet table and regarded himself with his chin lifted in the air. "Good Lord!" he said. "*What* a neck! Wonder why I got such a thundering lump there."

He sat down on the bed, his eye still on the glass. "If I'd been exercised properly, if I'd been fed reasonable, if I hadn't been shoved out of a silly school into a silly shop— But there! the old folks didn't know no better. The schoolmaster ought to have. But he didn't, poor old fool!—Still, when it comes to meeting a girl like this—it's 'ard.

"I wonder what Adam 'd think of me—as a specimen. Civilisation, eigh? Heir of the ages! I'm

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nothing. I know nothing. I can't do anything—sketch a bit. Why wasn't I made an artist?

“Beastly cheap, after all, this suit does look, in the sunshine.

“No good, Hoopdriver. Anyhow, you don't tell yourself any lies about it. Lovers ain't your game, —anyway. But there's other things yet. You can help the young lady, and you will—I suppose she'll be going home— And that business of the bicycle's to see to, too, my man. *Forward*, Hoopdriver! If you ain't a beauty, that's no reason why you should stop and be copped, is it?”

And having got back in this way to a gloomy kind of self-satisfaction, he had another attempt at his hair before leaving his room and hurrying on breakfast for an early departure. While breakfast was preparing he wandered out into South Street and refurnished himself with the elements of luggage again. “No expense to be spared,” he murmured, disgorging the half-sovereign.

THE DEPARTURE FROM CHICHESTER

XXVIII

HE caused his "sister" to be called repeatedly, and when she came down, explained with a humorous smile his legal relationship to the bicycle in the yard. "Might be disagreeable, y' know." His anxiety was obvious enough. "Very well," she said (quite friendly); "hurry breakfast, and we'll ride out. I want to talk things over with you." The girl seemed more beautiful than ever after the night's sleep; her hair in comely dark waves from her forehead, her ungauntleted finger-tips pink and cool. And how decided she was! Breakfast was a nervous ceremony, conversation fraternal but thin; the waiter overawed him, and he was cowed by a multiplicity of forks. But she called him "Chris." They discussed their route over his sixpenny county map for the sake of talking, but avoided a decision in the presence of the attendant. The five-pound note was changed for the bill, and through Hoopdriver's determination to be quite the gentleman, the waiter and chambermaid got half a crown each and the ostler a florin. "'Olidays," said the ostler to himself, without gratitude. The public mounting of the bicycles in the street was a moment of trepidation. A policeman actually stopped and watched them from the opposite kerb. Suppose him to come across and ask: "Is that your bicycle, sir?" Fight? Or drop

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it and run? It was a time of bewildering apprehension, too, going through the streets of the town, so that a milk cart barely escaped destruction under Mr. Hoopdriver's chancey wheel. That recalled him to a sense of erratic steering, and he pulled himself together. In the lanes he breathed more freely, and a less formal conversation presently began.

"You've ridden out of Chichester in a great hurry," said Jessie.

"Well, the fact of it is I'm worried, just a little bit. About this machine."

"Of course," she said. "I had forgotten that. But where are we going?"

"Jest a turning or two more, if you don't mind," said Hoopdriver. "Jest a mile or so. I have to think of you, you know. I should feel more easy. If we was locked up, you know— Not that I should mind on my own account——"

They rode with a streaky, grey sea coming and going on their left hand. Every mile they put between themselves and Chichester Mr. Hoopdriver felt a little less conscience-stricken, and a little more of the gallant desperado. Here he was riding on a splendid machine with a Slap-up girl beside him. What would they think of it in the Emporium if any of them were to see him? He imagined in detail the astonishment of Miss Isaacs and of Miss Howe. "Why! It's Mr. Hoopdriver," Miss Isaacs would say. "*Never!*" emphatically from Miss Howe. Then he played with Briggs, and then tried the "G. V." in a shay. "Fancy introjuicing 'em to her— My sister *pro tem.*" He was her brother Chris—

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Chris what?—Confound it! Harrigon, Hartington—something like that. Have to keep off that topic until he could remember. Wish he'd told her the truth now—almost. He glanced at her. She was riding with her eyes straight ahead of her. Thinking. A little perplexed, perhaps, she seemed. He noticed how well she rode, and that she rode with her lips closed—a thing he could never manage.

Mr. Hoopdriver's mind came round to the future. What was she going to do? What were they both going to do? His thoughts took a graver colour. He had rescued her. This was fine, manly rescue work he was engaged upon. She ought to go home, in spite of that stepmother. He must insist gravely but firmly upon that. She was the spirited sort, of course, but still— Wonder if she had any money? Wonder what the second-class fare from Havant to London is? Of course he would have to pay that—it was the regular thing, he being a gentleman. Then should he take her home? He began to rough in a moving sketch of the return. The stepmother, repentant of her indescribable cruelties, would be present,—even these rich people have their troubles,—probably an uncle or two. The footman would announce, Mr.—(bother that name!) and Miss Milton. Then two women weeping together, and a knightly figure in the background dressed in a handsome Norfolk jacket, still conspicuously new. He would conceal his feeling until the very end. Then, leaving, he would pause in the doorway in such an attitude as Mr. George Alexander might assume, and say, slowly and dwindlingly: “Be kind

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to her—*be* kind to her,” and so depart, heartbroken to the meanest intelligence. But that was a matter for the future. He would have to begin discussing the return soon. There was no traffic along the road, and he came up beside her (he had fallen behind in his musing). She began to talk. “Mr. Denison,” she began, and then, doubtfully, “That *is* your name? I’m very stupid——”

“It is,” said Mr. Hoopdriver. (Denison, was it? Denison, Denison, Denison. What was she saying?)

“I wonder how far you are willing to help me?”

Confoundedly hard to answer a question like that on the spur of the moment, without steering wildly. “You may rely—” said Mr. Hoopdriver, recovering from a violent wobble. “I can assure you—I want to help you very much. Don’t consider me at all. Leastways, consider me entirely at your service.” (Nuisance not to be able to say this kind of thing right.)

“You see, I am so awkwardly situated.”

“If I can only help you—you will make me very happy—” There was a pause. Round a bend in the road they came upon a grassy space between hedge and road, set with yarrow and meadowsweet, where a felled tree lay among the green. There she dismounted, and propping her machine against a stone, sat down. “Here we can talk,” she said.

“Yes,” said Mr. Hoopdriver, expectant.

She answered after a little while, sitting, elbow on knee, with her chin in her hand, and looking straight in front of her. “I don’t know—I am resolved to Live my Own Life.”

THE DEPARTURE FROM CHICHESTER

“Of course,” said Mr. Hoopdriver. “Naturally.”

“I want to Live, and I want to see what life means. I want to learn. Every one is hurrying me, everything is hurrying me; I want time to think.”

Mr. Hoopdriver was puzzled, but admiring. It was wonderful how clear and ready her words were. But then one might well speak prettily with a throat and lips like that. He knew he was inadequate, but he tried to meet the occasion. “If you let them rush you into anything you might repent of, of course you’d be very silly,” he said.

“Don’t *you* want to learn?” she asked.

“I was wondering only this morning,” he began, and stopped.

She was too intent upon her own thoughts to notice this insufficiency. “I find myself in life, and it terrifies me. I seem to be like a little speck whirling on a wheel, suddenly caught up. ‘What am I here for?’ I ask. Simply to be here a time—I asked it a week ago, I asked it yesterday, and I ask it to-day. And little things happen and the days pass. My stepmother takes me shopping, people come to tea, there is a new play to pass the time, or a concert, or a novel. The wheels of the world go on turning, turning. It is horrible. I want to do a miracle like Joshua and stop the whirl until I have fought it out. At home— It’s impossible.”

Mr. Hoopdriver stroked his moustache. “It *is* so,” he said in a meditative tone. “Things *will* go on.” The faint breath of summer stirred the trees, and a bunch of dandelion puff lifted among the meadowsweet and struck and broke into a dozen

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separate threads against his knee. They flew on apart, and sank, as the breeze fell, among the grass: some to germinate, some to perish. His eyes followed them until they had vanished.

"I can't go back to Surbiton," said the Young Lady in Grey.

"*Eigh?*" said Mr. Hoopdriver, catching at his moustache. This was an unexpected development.

"I want to write, you see," said the Young Lady in Grey, "to write Books and alter things. To do Good. I want to lead a Free Life and Own myself. I can't go back. I want to obtain a position as a Journalist. I have been told— But I know no one to help me at once. No one that I could go to. There is one person— She was a mistress at my school. If I could write to her— But then, how could I get her answer?"

"H'mp," said Mr. Hoopdriver, very grave.

"I can't trouble you much more. You have come—you have risked things——"

"That don't count," said Mr. Hoopdriver. "It's double pay to let me do it, so to speak."

"It is good of you to say that. Surbiton is so Conventional. I am resolved to be Unconventional—at any cost. But we are so hampered. If I could only burgeon out of all that hinders me! I want to struggle, to take my place in the world. I want to be my own mistress, to shape my own career. But my stepmother objects so. She does as she likes herself, and is strict with me to ease her conscience. And if I go back now, go back owning myself beaten—" She left the rest to his imagination.

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"I see that," agreed Mr. Hoopdriver. He *must* help her. Within his skull he was doing some intricate arithmetic with five pounds six and two pence. In some vague way he inferred from all this that Jessie was trying to escape from an undesirable marriage, but was saying these things out of modesty. His circle of ideas was so limited.

"You know, Mr.—I've forgotten your name again."

Mr. Hoopdriver seemed lost in abstraction. "You can't go back of course, quite like that," he said thoughtfully. His ears were suddenly red and his cheeks flushed.

"But what *is* your name?"

"Name!" said Mr. Hoopdriver. "Why!—Benson, of course."

"Mr. Benson—yes—it's really very stupid of me. But I can never remember names. I must make a note on my cuff." She clicked a little silver pencil and wrote the name down. "If I could write to my friend, I believe she would be able to help me to an independent life. I could write to her—or telegraph. Write, I think. I could scarcely explain in a telegram. I know she would help me."

Clearly there was only one course open to a gentleman under the circumstances. "In that case," said Mr. Hoopdriver, "if you don't mind trusting yourself to a stranger, we might continue as we are perhaps. For a day or so. Until you heard." (Suppose thirty shillings a day, that gives four days, say four thirties is hun' and twenty, six quid,—well, three days, say; four ten.)

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“You are very good to me.”

His expression was eloquent.

“Very well, then, and thank you. It’s wonderful—it’s more than I deserve that you—” She dropped the theme abruptly. “What was our bill at Chichester?”

“Eigh?” said Mr. Hoopdriver, feigning a certain stupidity. There was a brief discussion. Secretly he was delighted at her insistence on paying. She carried her point. Their talk came round to their immediate plans for the day. They decided to ride easily through Havant, and stop perhaps at Fareham or Southampton. For the previous day had tried them both. Holding the map extended on his knee, Mr. Hoopdriver’s eye fell by chance on the bicycle at his feet. “That bicycle,” he remarked, quite irrelevantly, “wouldn’t look the same machine if I got a big double Elarum instead of that little bell.”

“Why?”

“Jest a thought.” A pause.

“Very well then,—Havant and lunch,” said Jessie, rising.

“I wish, somehow, we could have managed it without stealing that machine,” said Hoopdriver. “Because it *is* stealing it, you know, come to think of it.”

“Nonsense. If Mr. Bechamel troubles you—I will tell the whole world—if need be.”

“I believe you would,” said Mr. Hoopdriver, admiring her. “You’re plucky enough—goodness knows.”

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Discovering suddenly that she was standing, he, too, rose and picked up her machine. She took it and wheeled it into the road. Then he took his own. He paused, regarding it. "I say!" said he. "How'd this bike look, now, if it was enamelled grey?"

She looked over her shoulder at his grave face. "Why try and hide it in that way?"

"It was jest a passing thought," said Mr. Hoopdriver, airily. "Didn't *mean* anything, you know."

As they were riding on to Havant it occurred to Mr. Hoopdriver in a transitory manner that the interview had been quite other than his expectation. But that was the way with everything in Mr. Hoopdriver's experience. And though his Wisdom looked grave within him, and Caution was chinking coins, and an ancient prejudice in favour of Property shook her head, something else was there too, shouting in his mind to drown all these saner considerations, the intoxicating thought of riding beside Her all to-day, all to-morrow, perhaps for other days after that. Of talking to her familiarly, being brother of all her slender strength and freshness, of having a golden, real, and wonderful time beyond all his imaginings. His old familiar fancyings gave place to anticipations as impalpable and fluctuating and beautiful as the sunset of a summer day.

At Havant he took an opportunity to purchase, at a small hairdresser's in the main street, a toothbrush, a pair of nail scissors, and a little bottle of stuff to darken the moustache, an article the shopman introduced to his attention, recommended highly, and sold in the excitement of the occasion.

THE UNEXPECTED ANECDOTE OF THE LION

XXIX

THEY rode on to Cosham and lunched lightly but expensively there. Jessie went out and posted her letter to her school friend. Then the green height of Portsdown Hill tempted them, and leaving their machines in the village they clambered up the slope to the silent red-brick fort that crowned it. Thence they had a view of Portsmouth and its cluster of sister towns, the crowded narrows of the harbour, the Solent and the Isle of Wight like a blue cloud through the hot haze. Jessie by some miracle had become a skirted woman in the Cosham inn. Mr. Hoopdriver lounged gracefully on the turf, smoked a Red Herring cigarette, and lazily regarded the fortified towns that spread like a map away there, the inner line of defence like toy fortifications, a mile off perhaps; and beyond that a few little fields and then the beginnings of Landport suburb and the smoky cluster of the multitudinous houses. To the right at the head of the harbour shallows the town of Porchester rose among the trees. Mr. Hoopdriver's anxiety receded to some remote corner of his brain, and that florid half-voluntary imagination of his shared the stage with the image of Jessie. He began to speculate on the impression he was creating. He took stock of his suit in a more optimistic spirit, and reviewed, with some complacency, his actions for the last four and

THE ANECDOTE OF THE LION

twenty hours. Then he was dashed at the thought of her infinite perfections.

She had been observing him quietly, rather more closely during the last hour or so. She did not look at him directly because he seemed always looking at her. Her own troubles had quieted down a little, and her curiosity about the chivalrous, worshipping, but singular gentleman in brown, was awakening. She had recalled, too, the curious incident of their first encounter. She found him hard to explain to herself. You must understand that her knowledge of the world was rather less than nothing, having been obtained entirely from books. You must not take a certain ignorance for foolishness.

She had begun with a few experiments. He did not know French except "*sivverplay*," a phrase he seemed to regard as a very good light table joke in itself. His English was uncertain, but not such as books informed her distinguished the lower classes. His manners seemed to her good on the whole, but a trifle over-respectful and out of fashion. He called her "Madam" once. He seemed a person of means and leisure, but he knew nothing of recent concerts, theatres, or books. How did he spend his time? He was certainly chivalrous, and a trifle simple-minded. She fancied (so much is there in a change of costume) that she had never met with such a man before. What *could* he be?

"Mr. Benson," she said, breaking a silence devoted to landscape.

He rolled over and regarded her, chin on knuckles.

"At your service."

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“Do you paint? Are you an artist?”

“Well.” Judicious pause. “I should hardly call myself a Nartist, you know. I *do* paint a little. And sketch, you know—skitty kind of things.”

He plucked and began to nibble a blade of grass. It was really not so much lying as his quick imagination that prompted him to add, “In Papers, you know, and all that.”

“I see,” said Jessie, looking at him thoughtfully. Artists were a very heterogeneous class certainly, and geniuses had a trick of being a little odd. He avoided her eye and bit his grass. “I don’t do *much*, you know.”

“It’s not your profession?”

“Oh, no,” said Hoopdriver, anxious now to hedge. “I don’t make a regular thing of it, you know. Jest now and then something comes into my head and down it goes. No—I’m not a *regular* artist.”

“Then you don’t practise any regular profession?”

Mr. Hoopdriver looked into her eyes and saw their quiet unsuspecting regard. He had vague ideas of resuming the detective *rôle*. “It’s like this,” he said, to gain time. “I have a sort of profession. Only there’s a kind of reason—nothing much, you know——”

“I beg your pardon for cross-examining you.”

“No trouble,” said Mr. Hoopdriver. “Only I can’t very well—I leave it to you, you know. I don’t want to make any mystery of it, so far as that goes.” Should he plunge boldly and be a barrister? That anyhow was something pretty good. But she might know about barristry.

THE ANECDOTE OF THE LION

"I think I could guess what you are."

"Well—guess," said Mr. Hoopdriver.

"You come from one of the colonies?"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Hoopdriver, veering round to the new wind. "How did you find out *that*?" (the man was born in a London suburb, dear Reader.)

"I guessed," she said.

He lifted his eyebrows as one astonished, and clutched a new piece of grass.

"You were educated up country."

"Good again," said Hoopdriver, rolling over again on to his elbow. "You're a *clairvoy* ant." He bit at the grass, smiling. "Which colony was it?"

"That I don't know."

"You must guess," said Hoopdriver.

"South Africa," she said. "I strongly incline to South Africa."

"South Africa's quite a large place," he said.

"But South Africa is right?"

"You're warm," said Hoopdriver, "anyhow," and the while his imagination was eagerly exploring this new province.

"South Africa *is* right?" she insisted.

He turned over again and nodded, smiling reassuringly into her eyes.

"What made me think of South Africa was that novel of Olive Schreiner's, you know— 'The Story of an African Farm.' Gregory Rose is so like you."

"I never read 'The Story of an African Farm,'" said Hoopdriver. "I must. What's he like?"

"You must read the book. But it's a wonderful place, with its mixture of races, and its brand-new

THE WHEELS OF CHANCE

civilisation jostling the old savagery. Were you near Khama?"

"He was a long way off from our place," said Mr. Hoopdriver. "We had a little ostrich farm, you know— Just a few hundred of 'em, out Johannesburg way."

"On the Karroo—was it called?"

"That's the term. Some of it was freehold though. Luckily. We got along very well in the old days. —But there's no ostriches on that farm now." He had a diamond mine in his head, just at the moment, but he stopped and left a little to the girl's imagination. Besides which it had occurred to him with a kind of shock that he was lying.

"What became of the ostriches?"

"We sold 'em off, when we parted with the farm. Do you mind if I have another cigarette? That was when I was quite a little chap, you know, that we had this ostrich farm."

"Did you have Blacks and Boers about you?"

"Lots," said Mr. Hoopdriver, striking a match on his instep and beginning to feel hot at the new responsibility he had brought upon himself.

"How interesting! Do you know, I've never been out of England except to Paris and Mentone and Switzerland."

"One gets tired of travelling (*puff*) after a bit, of course."

"You must tell me about your farm in South Africa. It always stimulates my imagination to think of these places. I can fancy all the tall ostriches being driven out by a black herd to—graze, I suppose. How do ostriches feed?"

THE ANECDOTE OF THE LION

“Well,” said Hoopdriver. “That’s rather various. They have their fancies, you know. There’s fruit, of course, and that kind of thing. And chicken food, and so forth. You have to use judgment.”

“Did you ever see a lion?”

“They weren’t very common in our district,” said Hoopdriver, quite modestly. “But I’ve seen them, of course. Once or twice.”

“Fancy seeing a lion! Weren’t you frightened?”

Mr. Hoopdriver was now thoroughly sorry he had accepted that offer of South Africa. He puffed his cigarette and regarded the Solent languidly as he settled the fate of that lion in his mind. “I scarcely had time,” he said. “It all happened in a minute.”

“Go on,” she said.

“I was going across the inner paddock where the fatted ostriches were.”

“Did you *eat* ostriches, then? I did not know——”

“Eat them!—often. Very nice they *are* too, properly stuffed. Well, we—I, rather—was going across this paddock, and I saw something standing up in the moonlight and looking at me.” Mr. Hoopdriver was in a hot perspiration now. His invention seemed to have gone limp. “Luckily I had my father’s gun with me. I *was* scared, though, I can tell you. (*Puff.*) I just aimed at the end that I thought was the head. And let fly. (*Puff.*) And over it went, you know.”

“Dead?”

“*As* dead. It was one of the luckiest shots I ever fired. And I wasn’t much over nine at the time, neither.”

“*I* should have screamed and run away.”

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“There’s some things you can’t run away from,” said Mr. Hoopdriver. “To run would have been Death.”

“I don’t think I ever met a lion-killer before,” she remarked, evidently with a heightened opinion of him.

There was a pause. She seemed meditating further questions. Mr. Hoopdriver drew his watch hastily. “I say,” said Mr. Hoopdriver, showing it to her, “don’t you think we ought to be getting on?”

His face was flushed, his ears bright red. She ascribed his confusion to modesty. He rose with a lion added to the burdens of his conscience, and held out his hand to assist her. They walked down into Cosham again, resumed their machines, and went on at a leisurely pace along the northern shore of the big harbour. But Mr. Hoopdriver was no longer happy. This horrible, this fulsome lie, stuck in his memory. Why *had* he done it? She did not ask for any more South African stories, happily—at least until Porchester was reached—but talked instead of Living One’s Own Life, and how custom hung on people like chains. She talked wonderfully, and set Hoopdriver’s mind fermenting. By the Castle, Mr. Hoopdriver caught several crabs in little shore pools. At Fareham they stopped for a second tea, and left the place towards the hour of sunset, under such invigorating circumstances as in due course you shall hear.

THE RESCUE EXPEDITION

XXX

AND now to tell of those energetic cavaliers, Widgery, Dangle, and Phipps, and of that distressed beauty, "Thomas Plantagenet," well known in society, so the paragraphs said, as Mrs. Milton. We left them at Midhurst station, if I remember rightly, waiting, in a state of fine emotion, for the Chichester train. It was clearly understood by the entire Rescue Party that Mrs. Milton was bearing up bravely against almost overwhelming grief. The three gentlemen outdid one another in sympathetic expedients; they watched her gravely—almost tenderly. The substantial Widgery tugged at his moustache, and looked his unspeakable feelings at her with those dog-like, brown eyes of his; the slender Dangle tugged at *his* moustache, and did what he could with unsympathetic grey ones. Phipps, unhappily, had no moustache to run any risks with, so he folded his arms and talked in a brave, indifferent, bearing-up tone about the London, Brighton, and South Coast Railway, just to cheer the poor woman up a little. And even Mrs. Milton really felt that exalted melancholy to the very bottom of her heart, and tried to show it in a dozen little delicate, feminine ways.

"There is nothing to do until we get to Chichester," said Dangle. "Nothing."

THE WHEELS OF CHANCE

“Nothing,” said Widgery, and aside in her ear: “You really ate scarcely anything, you know.”

“Their trains are always late,” said Phipps, with his fingers along the edge of his collar.

Dangle, you must understand, was a sub-editor and reviewer, and his pride was to be Thomas Plantagenet’s intellectual companion. Widgery, the big man, was manager of a bank and a mighty golfer, and his conception of his relations to her never came into his mind without those charming old lines, “Douglas, Douglas, tender and true,” falling hard upon its heels. His name was Douglas—Douglas Widgery. And Phipps, Phipps was a medical student still, and he felt that he laid his heart at her feet, the heart of a man of the world. She was kind to them all in her way, and insisted on their being friends together, in spite of a disposition to reciprocal criticism they displayed. Dangle thought Widgery a Philistine, appreciating but coarsely the merits of “A Soul Untrammelled,” and Widgery thought Dangle lacked humanity—would talk insincerely to say a clever thing. Both Dangle and Widgery thought Phipps a bit of a cub, and Phipps thought both Dangle and Widgery a couple of Thundering Bounders.

“They would have got to Chichester in time for lunch,” said Dangle, in the train. “After, perhaps. And there’s no sufficient place on the road. So soon as we get there, Phipps must inquire at the chief hotels to see if any one answering to her description has lunched there.”

“Oh, *I’ll* inquire,” said Phipps. “Willingly. I suppose you and Widgery will just hang about——”

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He saw an expression of pain on Mrs. Milton's gentle face, and stopped abruptly.

"No," said Dangle, "we shan't *hang about*, as you put it. There are two places in Chichester where tourists might go—the cathedral and a remarkably fine museum. I shall go to the cathedral and make an inquiry or so, while Widgery——"

"The museum. Very well. And after that there's a little thing or two I've thought of myself," said Widgery.

To begin with they took Mrs. Milton in a kind of procession to the Red Hotel and established her there with some tea. "You are so kind to me," she said. "All of you." They signified that it was nothing, and dispersed to their inquiries. By six they returned, their zeal a little damped, without news. Widgery came back with Dangle. Phipps was the last to return. "You're quite sure," said Widgery, "that there isn't any flaw in that inference of yours?"

"Quite," said Dangle, rather shortly.

"Of course," said Widgery, "their starting from Midhurst on the Chichester road doesn't absolutely bind them not to change their minds."

"My dear fellow! It does. Really it does. You must allow me to have enough intelligence to think of cross-roads. Really you must. There aren't any cross-roads to tempt them. Would they turn aside here? No. Would they turn there? Many more things are inevitable than you fancy."

"We shall see at once," said Widgery, at the window. "Here comes Phipps. For my own part——"

"Mr. Phipps!" said Mrs. Milton. "Is he hurrying?"

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Does he look—” She rose in her eagerness, biting her trembling lip, and went towards the window.

“No news,” said Phipps, entering.

“Ah!” said Widgery.

“None?” said Dangle.

“Well,” said Phipps. “One fellow had got hold of a queer story of a man in bicycling clothes, who was asking the same question about this time yesterday.”

“What question?” said Mrs. Milton, in the shadow of the window. She spoke in a low voice, almost a whisper.

“Why—Have you seen a young lady in a grey bicycling costume?”

Dangle caught at his lower lip. “What’s that?” he said. “Yesterday! A man asking after her then! What can *that* mean?”

“Heaven knows,” said Phipps, sitting down wearily. “You’d better infer.”

“What kind of man?” said Dangle.

“How should I know?—in bicycling costume, the fellow said.”

“But what height?—What complexion?”

“Didn’t ask,” said Phipps.

“*Didn’t ask!* Nonsense,” said Dangle.

“Ask him yourself,” said Phipps. “He’s an ostler chap in the White Hart,—short, thick-set fellow, with a red face and a crusty manner. Leaning up against the stable door. Smells of whiskey. Go and ask him.”

“Of course,” said Dangle, taking his straw hat from the shade over the stuffed bird on the chiffonier

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and turning towards the door. "I might have known."

Phipps' mouth opened and shut.

"You're tired, I'm sure, Mr. Phipps," said the lady, soothingly. "Let me ring for some tea for you." It suddenly occurred to Phipps that he had lapsed a little from his chivalry. "I was a little annoyed at the way he rushed me to do all this business," he said. "But I'd do a hundred times as much if it would bring *you* any nearer to her." Pause. "I *would* like a little tea."

"I don't want to raise any false hopes," said Widgery. "But I do *not* believe they even came to Chichester. Dangle's a very clever fellow, of course, but sometimes these Inferences of his——"

"Tchak!" said Phipps, suddenly.

"What is it?" said Mrs. Milton.

"Something I've forgotten. I went right out from here, went to every other hotel in the place, and never thought— But never mind. I'll ask when the waiter comes."

"You don't mean——"

A tap, and the door opened. "Tea, m'm? yes, m'm," said the waiter.

"One minute," said Phipps. "Was a lady in grey, a cycling lady——?"

"Stopped here yesterday? Yessir. Stopped the night. With her brother, sir—a young gent."

"Brother!" said Mrs. Milton, in a low tone. "Thank God!"

The waiter glanced at her and understood everything. "A young gent, sir," he said, "very free

THE WHEELS OF CHANCE

with his money. Give the name of Beaumont." He proceeded to some rambling particulars, and was cross-examined by Widgery on the plans of the young couple.

"Havant! Where's Havant?" said Phipps. "I seem to remember it somewhere."

"Was the man tall?" said Mrs. Milton, intently, "distinguished looking? with a long, flaxen moustache? and spoke with a drawl?"

"Well," said the waiter, and thought. "His moustache, m'm, was scarcely long—scrubby more, and young looking."

"About thirty-five, he was?"

"No, m'm. More like five and twenty. Not that."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Milton, speaking in a curious, hollow voice, fumbling for her salts, and showing the finest self-control. "It must have been her *younger* brother—must have been."

"That will do, thank you," said Widgery officiously, feeling that she would be easier under this new surprise if the man were dismissed. The waiter turned to go, and almost collided with Dangle, who was entering the room, panting excitedly and with a pocket handkerchief held to his right eye. "Hullo!" said Dangle. "What's up?"

"What's up with *you*?" said Phipps.

"Nothing—an altercation merely with that drunken ostler of yours. He thought it was a plot to annoy him—that the Young Lady in Grey was mythical. Judged from your manner. I've got a piece of raw meat to keep over it. You have some news, I see?"

THE RESCUE EXPEDITION

“Did the man hit you?” asked Widgery.

Mrs. Milton rose and approached Dangle. “Cannot I do anything?”

Dangle was heroic. “Only tell me your news,” he said, round the corner of the handkerchief.

“It was in this way,” said Phipps, and explained rather sheepishly. While he was doing so, with a running fire of commentary from Widgery, the waiter brought in a tray of tea. “A time table,” said Dangle, promptly, “for Havant.” Mrs. Milton poured two cups, and Phipps and Dangle partook in passover form. They just caught the train. So to Havant and inquiries.

Dangle was puffed up to find that his guess of Havant was right. In view of the fact that beyond Havant the Southampton road has a steep hill continuously on the right-hand side, and the sea on the left, he hit upon a magnificent scheme for heading the young folks off. He and Mrs. Milton would go to Fareham, Widgery and Phipps should alight one each at the intermediate stations of Cosham and Porchester, and come on by the next train if they had no news. If they did not come on, a wire to the Fareham post office was to explain why. It was Napoleonic, and more than consoled Dangle for the open derision of the Havant street boys at the handkerchief which still protected his damaged eye.

Moreover, the scheme answered to perfection. The fugitives escaped by a hair's breadth. They were outside the Golden Anchor at Fareham, and preparing to mount, as Mrs. Milton and Dangle came round the corner from the station. “It's her!” said Mrs.

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Milton, and would have screamed. "Hist!" said Dangle, gripping the lady's arm, removing his handkerchief in his excitement and leaving the piece of meat over his eye, an extraordinary appearance which seemed unexpectedly to calm her. "Be cool!" said Dangle, glaring under the meat. "They must not see us. They will get away else. Were there flies at the station?" The young couple mounted and vanished round the corner of the Winchester road. Had it not been for the publicity of the business, Mrs. Milton would have fainted. "*Save her!*" she said.

"Ah! A conveyance," said Dangle. "One minute."

He left her in a most pathetic attitude, with her hand pressed to her heart, and rushed into the Golden Anchor. Dog-cart in ten minutes. Emerged. The meat had gone now, and one saw the cooling puffiness over his eye. "I will conduct you back to the station," said Dangle; "hurry back here, and pursue them. You will meet Widgery and Phipps and tell them I am in pursuit."

She was whirled back to the railway station and left there, on a hard, blistered, wooden seat in the sun. She felt tired and dreadfully ruffled and agitated and dusty. Dangle was, no doubt, most energetic and devoted; but for a kindly, helpful manner commend her to Douglas Widgery.

Meanwhile Dangle, his face golden in the evening sun, was driving (as well as he could) a large black horse harnessed into a thing called a gig, northward towards Winchester. Dangle, barring his

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swollen eye, was a refined-looking little man, and he wore a deerstalker cap and was dressed in dark grey. His neck was long and slender. Perhaps you know what gigs are,—huge, big, wooden things and very high; and the horse, too, was huge and big and high, with knobby legs, a long face, a hard mouth, and a whacking trick of pacing. Smack, smack, smack, smack it went along the road, and hard by the church it shied vigorously at a hooded perambulator.

The history of the Rescue Expedition now becomes confused. It appears that Widgery was extremely indignant to find Mrs. Milton left about upon the Fareham platform. The day had irritated him somehow, though he had started with the noblest intentions, and he seemed glad to find an outlet for justifiable indignation. "He's such a spasmodic creature," said Widgery. "Rushing off! And I suppose we're to wait here until he comes back! It's likely. He's so egotistical, is Dangle. Always wants to mismanage everything himself."

"He means to help me," said Mrs. Milton a little reproachfully, touching his arm.

Widgery was hardly in the mood to be mollified all at once. "He need not prevent *me*," he said, and stopped. "It's no good talking, you know, and you are tired."

"I can go on," she said brightly; "if only we find her."

"While I was cooling my heels in Cosham I bought a county map." He produced and opened it. "Here, you see, is the road out of Fareham." He

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proceeded with the calm deliberation of a business man to develop a proposal of taking train forthwith to Winchester. "They *must* be going to Winchester," he explained. It was inevitable. To-morrow Sunday, Winchester a cathedral town, road going nowhere else of the slightest importance.

"But Mr. Dangle?"

"He will simply go on until he has to pass something, and then he will break his neck. I have seen Dangle drive before. It's scarcely likely a dog-cart, especially a hired dog-cart, will overtake bicycles in the cool of the evening. Rely upon me, Mrs. Milton——"

"I am in your hands," she said with pathetic littleness, looking up at him, and for the moment he forgot the exasperation of the day.

Phipps during this conversation had stood in a depressed attitude, leaning on his stick, feeling his collar, and looking from one speaker to the other. The idea of leaving Dangle behind seemed to him an excellent one. "We might leave a message at the place where he got the dog-cart," he suggested when he saw their eyes meeting. There was a cheerful alacrity about all three at the proposal.

But they never got beyond Botley. For even as their train ran into the station, a mighty rumbling was heard, there was a shouting overhead, the guard stood astonished on the platform, and Phipps, thrusting his head out of the window, cried, "There he goes!" and sprang out of the carriage. Mrs. Milton, following in alarm, just saw it. From Widgery it was hidden. Botley station lies in a cutting, over-

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head was the roadway; across the lemon yellows and flushed pinks of the sunset there whirled a great black mass, a horse like a long-nosed chess knight, the upper works of a gig, and Dangle in transit from front to back. A monstrous shadow aped him across the cutting. It was the event of a second. Dangle seemed to jump, hang in the air momentarily, and vanish, and after a moment's pause came a heart-rending smash. Then two black heads running swiftly.

"Better get out," said Phipps to Mrs. Milton, who stood fascinated in the doorway.

In another moment all three were hurrying up the steps. They found Dangle, hatless, standing up with cut hands extended, having his hands brushed by an officious small boy. A broad, ugly road ran downhill in a long vista, and in the distance was a little group of Botley inhabitants holding the big, black horse. Even at that distance they could see the expression of conscious pride on the monster's visage. It was as wooden-faced a horse as you can imagine. The beasts in the Tower of London, on which the men in armour are perched, are the only horses I have ever seen at all like it. However, we are not concerned now with the horse, but with Dangle. "Hurt?" asked Phipps, eagerly, leading.

"Mr. Dangle!" cried Mrs. Milton, clasping her hands.

"Hullo!" said Dangle, not surprised in the slightest. "Glad you've come. I may want you. Bit of a mess I'm in—eigh? But I've caught 'em. At the very place I expected, too."

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“Caught them!” said Widgery. “Where are they?”

“Up there,” he said, with a backward motion of his head. “About a mile up the hill. I left ’em. I *had* to.”

“I don’t understand,” said Mrs. Milton, with that rapt, painful look again. “Have you found Jessie?”

“I have. I wish I could wash the gravel out of my hands somewhere. It was like this, you know. Came on them suddenly round a corner. Horse shied at the bicycles. They were sitting by the roadside botanising flowers. I just had time to shout, ‘Jessie Milton, we’ve been looking for you,’ and then that confounded brute bolted. I didn’t dare turn round. I had all my work to do to save myself being turned over, as it was—so long as I did, I mean. I just shouted, ‘Return to your friends. All will be forgiven.’ And off I came, clatter, clatter. Whether they heard——”

“*Take me to her,*” said Mrs. Milton with intensity, turning towards Widgery.

“Certainly,” said Widgery, suddenly becoming active. “How far is it, Dangle?”

“Mile and a half or two miles. I was determined to find them, you know. I say though—Look at my hands! But I beg your pardon, Mrs. Milton.” He turned to Phipps. “Phipps, I say, where shall I wash the gravel out? And have a look at my knee?”

“There’s the station,” said Phipps, becoming helpful. Dangle made a step, and a damaged knee became evident. “Take my arm,” said Phipps.

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“Where can we get a conveyance?” asked Widgery of two small boys.

The two small boys failed to understand. They looked at one another.

“There’s not a cab, not a go-cart, in sight,” said Widgery. “It’s a case of a horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse.”

“There’s a harse all right,” said one of the small boys with a movement of the head.

“Don’t you know where we can hire traps?” asked Widgery.

“Or a cart or—anything?” asked Mrs. Milton.

“John Ooker’s gart a cart, but no one can’t ’ire’n,” said the larger of the small boys, partially averting his face and staring down the road and making a song of it. “And so’s my feyther, for’s leg us broke.”

“Not a cart even! Evidently. What shall we do?”

It occurred to Mrs. Milton that if Widgery was the man for courtly devotion, Dangle was infinitely readier of resource. “I suppose—” she said, timidly. “Perhaps if you were to ask Mr. Dangle——”

And then all the gilt came off Widgery. He answered quite rudely. “Confound Dangle! Hasn’t he messed us up enough? He must needs drive after them in a trap to tell them we’re coming, and now you want me to ask him——”

Her beautiful blue eyes were filled with tears. He stopped abruptly. “I’ll go and ask Dangle,” he said, shortly. “If you wish it.” And went striding into the station and down the steps, leaving her in the road under the quiet inspection of the two little

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boys, and with a kind of ballad refrain running through her head, "Where are the Knights of the Olden Time?" and feeling tired to death and hungry and dusty and out of curl and, in short, a martyr woman.

XXXI

It goes to my heart to tell of the end of that day, how the fugitives vanished into Immensity; how there were no more trains; how Botley stared unsympathetically with a palpable disposition to derision, denying conveyances; how the landlord of the Heron was suspicious, how the next day was Sunday and the hot summer's day had crumpled the collar of Phipps and stained the skirts of Mrs. Milton, and dimmed the radiant emotions of the whole party. Dangle, with sticking-plaster and a black eye, felt the absurdity of the pose of the Wounded Knight, and abandoned it after the faintest efforts. Recriminations never, perhaps, held the foreground of the talk, but they played like summer lightning on the edge of the conversation. And deep in the hearts of all was a galling sense of the ridiculous. Jessie, they thought, was most to blame. Apparently too, the worst, which would have made the whole business tragic, was not happening. Here was a young woman—*young woman do I say? a mere girl!*—had chosen to leave a comfortable home in Surbiton and all the delights of a refined and intellectual circle, and had rushed off, trailing us after her, posing hard, mutually jealous, and now tired and weather-worn, to flick us off at last, mere

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mud from her wheel, into this detestable village beer-house on a Saturday night! And she had done it, not for Love and Passion, which are serious excuses one may recognise even if one must reprove, but just for a Freak, just for a fantastic Idea; for nothing, in fact, but the outraging of Common Sense. Yet withal, such was our restraint, that we talked of her still as one much misguided, as one who burdened us with anxiety, as a lamb astray; and Mrs. Milton having eaten, continued to show the finest feelings on the matter.

She sat, I may mention, in the cushioned basket-chair, the only comfortable chair in the room, and we sat on incredibly hard, horsehair things having antimacassars tied to their backs by means of lemon-coloured bows. It was different from those dear old talks at Surbiton, somehow. She sat facing the window, which was open (the night was so tranquil and warm), and the dim light—for we did not use the lamp—suited her admirably. She talked in a voice that told you she was tired, and she seemed inclined to state a case against herself in the matter of "A Soul Untrammelled." It was such an evening as might live in a sympathetic memoir, but it was a little dull while it lasted.

"I feel," she said, "that I am to blame. I have Developed. That first book of mine—I do not go back upon a word of it, mind, but it has been misunderstood, misapplied."

"It has," said Widgery, trying to look so deeply sympathetic as to be visible in the dark. "Deliberately misunderstood."

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“Don’t say that,” said the lady. “Not deliberately. I try and think that critics are honest. After their lights. I was not thinking of critics. But she, I mean—” She paused, an interrogation.

“It is possible,” said Dangle, scrutinising his sticking-plaster.

“I write a book and state a case. I want people to *think* as I recommend, not to *do* as I recommend. It is just Teaching. Only I make it into a story. I want to Teach new Ideas, new Lessons, to promulgate Ideas. Then when the Ideas have been spread abroad—Things will come about. Only now it is madness to fly in the face of the established order. Bernard Shaw, you know, has explained that with regard to Socialism. We all know that to earn all you consume is right, and that living on invested capital is wrong. Only we cannot begin while we are so few. It is Those Others.”

“Precisely,” said Widgery. “It is Those Others. They must begin first.”

“And meanwhile you go on banking——”

“If I didn’t, some one else would.”

“And I live on Mr. Milton’s Lotion while I try to gain a footing in Literature.”

“*Try!*” said Phipps. “You *have* done so.” And, “That’s different,” said Dangle, at the same time.

“You are so kind to me. But in this matter. Of course Georgina Griffiths in my book lived alone in a flat in Paris and went to life classes and had men visitors, but then she was over twenty-one.”

“Jessica is only seventeen, and girlish for that,” said Dangle.

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"It alters everything. That child! It is different with a woman. And Georgina Griffiths never flaunted her freedom—on a bicycle, in country places. In this country. Where every one is so particular. Fancy, *sleeping* away from home. It's dreadful— If it gets about it spells ruin for her."

"Ruin," said Widgery.

"No man would marry a girl like that," said Phipps.

"It must be hushed up," said Dangle.

"It always seems to me that life is made up of individuals, of individual cases. We must weigh each person against his or her circumstances. General rules don't apply——"

"I often feel the force of that," said Widgery.

"Those are my rules. Of course my books——"

"It's different, altogether different," said Dangle.

"A novel deals with typical cases."

"And life is not typical," said Widgery, with immense profundity.

Then suddenly, unintentionally, being himself most surprised and shocked of any in the room, Phipps yawned. The yawning was infectious, and the gathering having, as you can easily understand, talked itself weary, dispersed on trivial pretences. But not to sleep immediately. Directly Dangle was alone he began, with infinite disgust, to scrutinise his darkling eye, for he was a neat-minded little man in spite of his energy. The whole business—so near a capture—was horribly vexatious. Phipps sat on his bed for some time examining, with equal disgust, a collar he would have thought incredible

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for Sunday twenty-four hours before. Mrs. Milton fell a-musing on the mortality of even big, fat men with dog-like eyes, and Widgery was unhappy because he had been so cross to her at the station, and because so far he did not feel that he had scored over Dangle. Also he was angry with Dangle. And all four of them, being souls living very much upon the appearances of things, had a painful mental middle distance of Botley derisive and suspicious, and a remoter background of London humorous, and Surbiton speculative. Were they really, after all, behaving absurdly?

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XXXII

As Mr. Dangle had witnessed, the fugitives had been left by him at the side of the road about two miles from Botley. Before Mr. Dangle's appearance, Mr. Hoopdriver had been learning with great interest that mere roadside flowers had names,—star-flowers, wind-stars, St. John's wort, willow herb, lords and ladies, bachelor's buttons,—most curious names, some of them. "The flowers are all different in South Africa, y'know," he was explaining with a happy fluke of his imagination to account for his ignorance. Then suddenly, heralded by clattering sounds and a gride of wheels, Dangle had flared and thundered across the tranquillity of the summer evening; Dangle, swaying and gesticulating behind a corybantic black horse, had hailed Jessie by her name, had backed towards the hedge for no ostensible reason, and vanished to the accomplishment of the Fate that had been written down for him from the very beginning of things. Jessie and Hoopdriver had scarcely time to stand up and seize their machines, before this tumultuous, this swift and wonderful passing of Dangle was achieved. He went from side to side of the road,—worse even than the riding forth of Mr. Hoopdriver it was,—and vanished round the corner.

"He knew my name," said Jessie. "Yes—it was Mr. Dangle."

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“That was our bicycles did that,” said Mr. Hoopdriver simultaneously, and speaking with a certain complacent concern. “I hope he won’t get hurt.”

“That was Mr. Dangle,” repeated Jessie, and Mr. Hoopdriver heard this time, with a violent start. His eyebrows went up spasmodically.

“What! some one you know?”

“Yes.”

“Lord!”

“He was looking for me,” said Jessie. “I could see. He began to call to me before the horse shied. My stepmother has sent him.”

Mr. Hoopdriver wished he had returned the bicycle after all, for his ideas were still a little hazy about Bechamel and Mrs. Milton. *Honesty is the best policy*—often, he thought. He turned his head this way and that. He became active. “After us, eigh? Then he’ll come back. He’s gone down that hill, and he won’t be able to pull up for a bit, I’m certain.”

Jessie, he saw, had wheeled her machine into the road and was mounting. Still staring at the corner that had swallowed up Dangle, Hoopdriver followed suit. And so, just as the sun was setting, they began another flight together,—riding now towards Bishops Waltham, with Mr. Hoopdriver in the post of danger—the rear—ever and again looking over his shoulder and swerving dangerously as he did so. Occasionally Jessie had to slacken her pace. He breathed heavily, and hated himself because his mouth fell open. After nearly an hour’s hard riding, they found themselves, uncaptured, at Winchester.

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Not a trace of Dangle nor any other danger was visible as they rode into the dusky, yellow-lit street. Though the bats had been fluttering behind the hedges and the evening star was bright while they were still two miles from Winchester, Mr. Hoopdriver pointed out the dangers of stopping in such an obvious abiding-place, and gently but firmly insisted upon replenishing the lamps and riding on towards Salisbury. From Winchester, roads branch in every direction, and to turn abruptly westward was clearly the way to throw off the chase. As Hoopdriver saw the moon rising broad and yellow through the twilight, he thought he should recover the effect of that ride out of Bognor; but somehow, albeit the moon and all the atmospheric effects were the same, the emotions were different. They rode in absolute silence, and slowly after they had cleared the outskirts of Winchester. Both of them were now nearly tired out,—the level was tedious, and even a little hill a burden; and so it came about that in the hamlet of Wallenstock they were beguiled to stop and ask for accommodation in an exceptionally prosperous-looking village inn. A plausible landlady rose to the occasion.

Now as they passed into the room where their suppers were prepared, Mr. Hoopdriver caught a glimpse through a door ajar and floating in a reek of smoke, of three and a half faces—for the edge of the door bisected one—and an American cloth-covered table with several glasses and a tankard. And he also heard a remark. In a second before he heard that remark, Mr. Hoopdriver had been a

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proud and happy man,—to particularize, a baronet's heir *incognito*. He had surrendered the bicycles to the odd man of the place with infinite easy dignity, and had bowingly opened the door for Jessie. "Who's that, then?" he imagined people saying; and then, "Some'n pretty well orf—judge by the bicycles." Then the imaginary spectators would fall a-talking of the fashionableness of bicycling,—how judges and stockbrokers and actresses and, in fact, all the best people rode,—and how that it was often the fancy of such great folk to shun the big hotels, the adulation of urban crowds, and seek, *incognito*, the cosy quaintnesses of village life. Then, maybe, they would think of a certain nameless air of distinction about the lady who had stepped across the doorway, and about the handsome, flaxen-moustached, blue-eyed cavalier who had followed her in, and they would look one to another. "Tell you what it is," one of the village elders would say—just as they do in novels—voicing the thought of all in a low, impressive tone: "There's such a thing as entertaining barranets unawares—not to mention no higher things——"

Such, I say, had been the filmy, delightful stuff in Mr. Hoopdriver's head the moment before he heard that remark. But the remark toppled him headlong. What the precise remark was need not concern us. It was a casual piece of such satire as Strephon delights in. Should you be curious, dear lady, as to its nature, you have merely to dress yourself in a really modern cycling costume, get one of the feeblest-looking of your men to escort you, and ride out next Saturday evening to any public

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house where healthy, homely people gather together. Then you will hear quite a lot of the kind of thing Mr. Hoopdriver heard. More, possibly, than you will desire.

The remark, I must add, implicated Mr. Hoopdriver. It indicated an entire disbelief in his social standing. At a blow it shattered the gorgeous fabric his imagination had so joyfully built. All that foolish happiness vanished like a dream. And there was nothing to show for it, as there is nothing to show for any spiteful remark that has ever been made. Perhaps the man who said the thing had a gleam of satisfaction at the idea of taking a complacent-looking fool down a peg, but it is just as possible he did not know at the time that his stray shot had hit. He had thrown it as a boy throws a stone at a bird. And it not only demolished a foolish happy conceit; it wounded. It touched Jessie grossly.

From her subsequent bearing Hoopdriver concluded that she had not heard it; but during the supper they had in the little private dining-room, though she talked cheerfully, he was preoccupied. Whiffs of indistinct conversation, and now and then laughter, came in from the inn parlour through the pelargoniums in the open window. He felt it must all be in the same strain,—at her expense and his. He answered her abstractedly. She was tired, she said, and presently went to her room. Mr. Hoopdriver, in his courtly way, opened the door for her and bowed her out. He stood listening and fearing some new offence as she went upstairs, and round the bend

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where the barometer hung beneath the stuffed birds. Then he went back to the room, and stood on the hearthrug before the paper grate-screen. "Cads!" he said in a scathing undertone, as a fresh burst of laughter came floating in. All through supper he had been composing stinging repartee, a blistering speech of denunciation to be presently delivered. He would rate them as a nobleman should: "Call themselves Englishmen, indeed, and insult a woman!" he would say; take their names and addresses perhaps, threaten to speak to the Lord of the Manor, promise to let them hear from him again, and so out with consternation in his wake. It really ought to be done.

"Teach 'em better," he said fiercely, and tweaked his moustache painfully. What was it? He revived the objectionable remark for his own exasperation, and then went over the heads of his speech again.

He coughed, made three steps towards the door, then stopped and went back to the hearthrug. He wouldn't—after all. Yet was he not a Knight-errant? Should such men go unreprieved, unchecked, by wandering baronets *incognito*? Magnanimity? Look at it in that way? Churls beneath one's notice? No; merely a cowardly subterfuge. He *would*—after all.

Something within him protested that he was a hot-headed ass even as he went towards the door again. But he only went on the more resolutely. He crossed the hall by the bar, and entered the room from which the remark had proceeded. He opened the door abruptly and stood scowling on

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them in the doorway. "You'll only make a mess of it," remarked the internal sceptic. There were five men in the room altogether: a fat person, with a long pipe and a great number of chins, in an armchair by the fireplace, who wished Mr. Hoopdriver a good evening very affably; a young fellow smoking a cutty and displaying crossed legs with gaiters; a little, bearded man with a toothless laugh; a middle-aged, comfortable man with bright eyes, who wore a velveteen jacket; and a fair young man, very genteel in a yellowish-brown ready-made suit and a white tie.

"H'm," said Mr. Hoopdriver, looking very stern and harsh. And then in a forbidding tone, as one who consented to no liberties, "Good evening."

"Very pleasant day we've been 'aving," said the fair young man with the white tie.

"Very," said Mr. Hoopdriver slowly; and taking a brown armchair, he planted it with great deliberation where he faced the fireplace, and sat down. Let's see—how did that speech begin?

"Very pleasant roads about here," said the fair young man with the white tie.

"Very," said Mr. Hoopdriver, eyeing him darkly. Have to begin somehow. "The roads about here are all right, and the weather about here is all right, but what I've come in here to say is—there's some damned unpleasant people—damned unpleasant people!"

"Oh!" said the young man with the gaiters, apparently making a mental inventory of his pearl buttons as he spoke. "How's that?"

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Mr. Hoopdriver put his hands on his knees and stuck out his elbows with extreme angularity. In his heart he was raving at his idiotic folly at thus bearding these lions,—indisputably they *were* lions,—but he had to go through with it now. Heaven send his breath, which was already getting a trifle spasmodic, did not suddenly give out. He fixed his eye on the face of the fat man with the chins, and spoke in a low, impressive voice. “I came here, sir,” said Mr. Hoopdriver, and paused to inflate his cheeks, “with a lady.”

“Very nice lady,” said the man with the gaiters, putting his head on one side to admire a pearl button that had been hiding behind the curvature of his calf. “Very nice lady indeed.”

“I came here,” said Mr. Hoopdriver, “with a lady.”

“We saw you did, bless you,” said the fat man with the chins, in a curious wheezy voice. “I don’t see there’s anything so very extraordinary in that. One ’ud think we hadn’t eyes.”

Mr. Hoopdriver coughed. “I came here, sir——”

“We’ve ’eard that,” said the little man with the beard sharply, and went off into an amiable chuckle. “We know it by ’art,” said the little man, elaborating the point.

Mr. Hoopdriver temporarily lost his thread. He glared malignantly at the little man with the beard, and tried to recover his discourse. A pause.

“You were saying,” said the fair young man with the white tie, speaking very politely, “that you came here with a lady.”

“A lady,” meditated the gaiter-gazer.

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The man in velveteen, who was looking from one speaker to another with keen, bright eyes, now laughed as though a point had been scored, and stimulated Mr. Hoopdriver to speak, by fixing him with an expectant regard.

“Some dirty cad,” said Mr. Hoopdriver, proceeding with his discourse and suddenly growing extremely fierce, “made a remark as we went by this door.”

“Steady on!” said the old gentleman with many chins. “Steady on! Don’t you go a-calling us names, please.”

“One minute!” said Mr. Hoopdriver. “It wasn’t I began calling names.” (“Who did?” said the man with chins.) “I’m not calling any of you dirty cads. Don’t run away with that impression. Only some person in this room made a remark that showed he wasn’t fit to wipe boots on, and, with all due deference to such gentlemen as *are* gentlemen” (Mr. Hoopdriver looked round for moral support), “I want to know which it was.”

“Meanin’?” said the fair young man in the white tie.

“That I’m going to wipe my boots on ’im straight away,” said Mr. Hoopdriver, reverting to anger, if with a slight catch in his throat—than which threat of personal violence nothing had been further from his thoughts on entering the room. He said this because he could think of nothing else to say, and stuck out his elbows truculently to hide the sinking of his heart. It is curious how situations run away with us.

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“’Ullo, Charlie!” said the little man, and “My eye!” said the owner of the chins. “You’re going to wipe your boots on ’im?” said the fair young man, in a tone of mild surprise.

“I am,” said Mr. Hoopdriver with emphatic resolution, and glared in the young man’s face.

“That’s fair and reasonable,” said the man in the velveteen jacket; “if you can.”

The interest of the meeting seemed transferred to the young man in the white tie. “Of course, if you can’t find out which it is, I suppose you’re prepared to wipe your boots in a liberal way on everybody in the room,” said this young man, in the same tone of impersonal question. “This gentleman, the champion lightweight——”

“Own up, Charlie,” said the young man with the gaiters, looking up for a moment. “And don’t go a-dragging in your betters. It’s fair and square. You can’t get out of it.”

“Was it this—gent?” began Mr. Hoopdriver.

“Of course,” said the young man in the white tie, “when it comes to talking of wiping boots——”

“I’m not talking; I’m going to do it,” said Mr. Hoopdriver.

He looked round at the meeting. They were no longer antagonists; they were spectators. He would have to go through with it now. But this tone of personal aggression on the maker of the remark had somehow got rid of the oppressive feeling of Hoopdriver *contra mundum*. Apparently, he would have to fight some one. Would he get a black eye? Would he get very much hurt? Pray goodness it

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wasn't that sturdy chap in the gaiters! Should he rise and begin? What would she think if he brought a black eye to breakfast to-morrow? "Is this the man?" said Mr. Hoopdriver, with a business-like calm, and arms more angular than ever.

"Eat 'im!" said the little man with the beard; "eat 'im straight orf."

"Steady on!" said the young man in the white tie. "Steady on a minute. If I did happen to say——"

"You did, did you?" said Mr. Hoopdriver.

"Backing out of it, Charlie?" said the young man with the gaiters.

"Not a bit," said Charlie. "Surely we can pass a bit of a joke——"

"I'm going to teach you to keep your jokes to yourself," said Mr. Hoopdriver.

"Bray-vo!" said the shepherd of the flock of chins.

"Charlie is a bit too free with his jokes," said the little man with the beard.

"It's downright disgusting," said Hoopdriver, falling back upon his speech. "A lady can't ride a bicycle in a country road, or wear a dress a little out of the ordinary, but every dirty little greaser must needs go shouting insults——"

"I didn't know the young lady would hear what I said," said Charlie. "Surely one can speak friendly to one's friends. How was I to know the door was open——?"

Hoopdriver began to suspect that his antagonist was, if possible, more seriously alarmed at the prospect of violence than himself, and his spirits rose

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again. These chaps ought to have a thorough lesson. "Of *course* you knew the door was open," he retorted indignantly. "Of *course* you thought we should hear what you said. Don't go telling lies about it. It's no good your saying things like that. You've had your fun, and you meant to have your fun. And I mean to make an example of you, Sir."

"Ginger beer," said the little man with the beard, in a confidential tone to the velveteen jacket, "is regular up this 'ot weather. Bustin' its bottles it is everywhere."

"What's the good of scrapping about in a public-house?" said Charlie, appealing to the company. "A fair fight without interruptions, now, I *wouldn't* mind, if the gentleman's so disposed."

Evidently the man was horribly afraid. Mr. Hoopdriver grew truculent.

"Where you like," said Mr. Hoopdriver. "Jest wherever you like."

"You insulted the gent," said the man in velveteen.

"Don't be a bloomin' funk, Charlie," said the man in gaiters. "Why, you got a stone of him, if you got an ounce."

"What I say, is this," said the gentleman with the excessive chins, trying to get a hearing by banging his chair arms. "If Charlie goes saying things, he ought to back 'em up. That's what I say. I don't mind his sayin' such things 't all, but he ought to be prepared to back 'em up."

"I'll *back* 'em up all right," said Charlie, with extremely bitter emphasis on "back." "If the gentleman likes to come Toosday week——"

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“Rot!” chopped in Hoopdriver. “Now.”

“’Ear, ’ear,” said the owner of the chins.

“Never put off till to-morrow, Charlie, what you can do to-day,” said the man in the velveteen coat.

“You got to do it, Charlie,” said the man in gaiters. “It’s no good.”

“It’s like this,” said Charlie, appealing to every one except Hoopdriver. “Here’s me, got to take in her ladyship’s dinner to-morrow night. How should I look with a black eye? And going round with the carriage with a split lip?”

“If you don’t want your face sp’iled, Charlie, why don’t you keep your mouth shut?” said the person in gaiters.

“Exactly,” said Mr. Hoopdriver, driving it home with great fierceness. “Why don’t you shut your ugly mouth?”

“It’s as much as my situation’s worth,” protested Charlie.

“You should have thought of that before,” said Hoopdriver.

“There’s no occasion to be so thunderin’ ’ot about it. I only meant the thing joking,” said Charlie. “As one gentleman to another, I’m very sorry if the gentleman’s annoyed——”

Everybody began to speak at once. Mr. Hoopdriver twirled his moustache. He felt that Charlie’s recognition of his gentlemanliness was at any rate a redeeming feature. But it became his pose to ride hard and heavy over the routed foe. He shouted some insulting phrase over the tumult.

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"You're regular abject," the man in gaiters was saying to Charlie.

More confusion.

"Only don't think I'm afraid,—not of a spindle-legged cuss like him!" shouted Charlie. "Because I ain't."

"Change of front," thought Hoopdriver, a little startled. "Where are we going?"

"Don't sit there and be abusive," said the man in velveteen. "He's offered to hit you, and if I was him, I'd hit you now."

"All right, then," said Charlie, with a sudden change of front and springing to his feet. "If I must, I must. Now, then!" At that, Hoopdriver, the child of Fate, rose too, with a horrible sense that his internal monitor was right. Things had taken a turn. He had made a mess of it, and now there was nothing for it, so far as he could see, but to hit the man at once. He and Charlie stood six feet apart, with a table between, both very breathless and fierce. A vulgar fight in a public-house, and with what was only too palpably a footman! Good Heavens! And this was the dignified, scornful remonstrance! How the juice had it all happened? Go round the table at him, I suppose. But before the brawl could achieve itself, the man in gaiters intervened. "Not here," he said, stepping between the antagonists. Every one was standing up.

"Charlie's artful," said the little man with the beard.

"Buller's yard," said the man with the gaiters,

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taking the control of the entire affair with the easy readiness of an accomplished practitioner. "If the gentleman *don't* mind." Buller's yard, it seemed, was the very place. "We'll do the thing regular and decent, *if* you please." And before he completely realised what was happening, Hoopdriver was being marched out through the back premises of the inn, to the first and only fight with fists that was ever to glorify his life.

Outwardly, so far as the intermittent moonlight showed, Mr. Hoopdriver was quietly but eagerly prepared to fight. But inwardly he was a chaos of conflicting purposes. It was extraordinary how things happened. One remark had trod so closely on the heels of another, that he had had the greatest difficulty in following the development of the business. He distinctly remembered himself walking across from one room to the other,—a dignified, even an aristocratic figure, primed with considered eloquence, intent upon a scathing remonstrance to these wretched yokels, regarding their manners. Then incident had flickered into incident until here he was out in a moonlit lane,—a slight dark figure in a group of larger, indistinct bulks,—marching in a quiet business-like way towards some unknown horror at Buller's yard. Fists! It was astonishing. It was terrible! In front of him was the pallid face of Charles, and he saw that the man in gaiters held Charles kindly but firmly by the arm.

"It's blasted rot," Charles was saying, "getting up a fight just for a thing like that; all very well for 'im. 'E's got 'is 'olidays; 'e 'asn't no blessed

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dinner to take up to-morrow night like I 'ave—
No need to numb my arm, *is there?*”

They went into Buller's yard through gates. There were sheds in Buller's yard—sheds of mystery that the moonlight could not solve—a smell of cows, and a pump stood out clear and black, throwing a clear black shadow on the whitewashed wall. And here it was his face was to be battered to a pulp. He knew this was the uttermost folly, to stand up here and be pounded, but the way out of it was beyond his imagining. Yet afterwards—? Could he ever face her again? He patted his Norfolk jacket and took his ground with his back to the gate. How did one square? So? Suppose he were to turn and run even now, run straight back to the inn and lock himself into his bedroom? They couldn't make him come out—anyhow. He could prosecute them for assault if they did. How did one set about prosecuting for assault? He saw Charles, with his face ghastly white under the moon, squaring in front of him.

He caught a blow on the arm and gave ground. Charles pressed him. Then he hit with his right and with the violence of despair. It was a hit of his own devising,—an impromptu,—but it chanced to coincide with the regulation hook hit at the head. He perceived with a leap of exultation that the thing his fist had met was the jawbone of Charles. It was the sole gleam of pleasure he experienced during the fight, and it was quite momentary. He had hardly got home upon Charles before he was struck in the chest and whirled backward. He had the greatest difficulty in keeping his feet. He felt

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that his heart was smashed flat. "Gord darm!" said somebody, dancing toe in hand somewhere behind him. As Mr. Hoopdriver staggered, Charles gave a loud and fear-compelling cry. He seemed to tower over Hoopdriver in the moonlight. Both his fists were whirling. It was annihilation coming—no less. Mr. Hoopdriver ducked perhaps and certainly gave ground to the right, hit, and missed. Charles swept round to the left, missing generously. A blow glanced over Mr. Hoopdriver's left ear, and the flanking movement was completed. Another blow behind the ear. Heaven and earth spun furiously round Mr. Hoopdriver, and then he became aware of a figure in a light suit shooting violently through an open gate into the night. The man in gaiters sprang forward past Mr. Hoopdriver, but too late to intercept the fugitive. There were shouts, laughter, and Mr. Hoopdriver, still solemnly squaring, realised the great and wonderful truth—Charles had fled. He, Hoopdriver, had fought and, by all the rules of war, had won.

"That was a pretty cut under the jaw you gave him," the toothless little man with the beard was remarking in an unexpectedly friendly manner.

"The fact of it is," said Mr. Hoopdriver, sitting beside the road to Salisbury, and with the sound of distant church bells in his ears, "I had to give the fellow a lesson; simply had to."

"It seems so dreadful that you should have to knock people about," said Jessie.

"These louts get unbearable," said Mr. Hoopdriver. "If now and then we didn't give them a

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lesson,—well, a lady cyclist on the roads would be an impossibility.”

“I suppose every woman shrinks from violence,” said Jessie. “I suppose men *are* braver—in a way—than women. It seems to me—I can’t imagine—how one could bring oneself to face a roomful of rough characters, pick out the bravest, and give him an exemplary thrashing. I quail at the idea. I thought only Ouida’s guardsmen did things like that.”

“It was nothing more than my juty—as a gentleman,” said Mr. Hoopdriver.

“But to walk straight into the face of danger!”

“It’s habit,” said Mr. Hoopdriver, quite modestly, flicking off a particle of cigarette ash that had settled on his knee.

THE ABASEMENT OF MR. HOOPDRIVER

XXXIII

ON Monday morning the two fugitives found themselves breakfasting at the Golden Pheasant in Blandford. They were in the course of an elaborate doubling movement through Dorsetshire towards Ringwood, where Jessie anticipated an answer from her schoolmistress friend. By this time they had been nearly sixty hours together, and you will understand that Mr. Hoopdriver's feelings had undergone a considerable intensification and development. At first Jessie had been only an impressionist sketch upon his mind, something feminine, active, and dazzling, something emphatically "above" him, cast into his company by a kindly fate. His chief idea at the outset, as you know, had been to live up to her level by pretending to be more exceptional, more wealthy, better educated, and, above all, better born than he was. His knowledge of the feminine mind was almost entirely derived from the young ladies he had met in business, and in that class (as in military society and among gentlemen's servants) the good old tradition of a brutal social exclusiveness is still religiously preserved. He had an almost intolerable dread of her thinking him a "bounder." Later he began to perceive the distinction of her idiosyncracies. Coupled with a magnificent want of experience was a splendid enthusiasm for abstract views of the most advanced description,

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and her strength of conviction completely carried Hoopdriver away. She was going to Live her Own Life, with emphasis, and Mr. Hoopdriver was profoundly stirred to similar resolves. So soon as he grasped the tenor of her views, he perceived that he himself had thought as much from his earliest years. "Of course," he remarked in a flash of sexual pride, "a man is freer than a woman. End in the Colonies, y'know, there isn't half the Conventionality you find in society in this country."

He made one or two essays in the display of unconventionality, and was quite unaware that he impressed her as a narrow-minded person. He suppressed the habits of years and made no proposal to go to church. He discussed church-going in a liberal spirit. "It's jest a habit," he said, "jest a custom. I don't see what good it does you at all, really." And he made a lot of excellent jokes at the chimney-pot hat, jokes he had read in the *Globe* "turnovers" on that subject. But he showed his gentle breeding by keeping his gloves on all through the Sunday's ride, and ostentatiously throwing away more than half a cigarette when they passed a church whose congregation was gathering for afternoon service. He cautiously avoided literary topics, except by way of compliment, seeing that she was presently to be writing books.

It was on Jessie's initiative that they attended service in the old-fashioned gallery of Blandford church. Jessie's conscience, I may perhaps tell you, was now suffering the severest twinges. She perceived clearly that things were not working out

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quite along the lines she had designed. She had read her Olive Schreiner and George Egerton and so forth, with the perfect lack of comprehension of one who is still emotionally a girl. She knew the thing to do was to have a flat and to go to the British Museum and write leading articles for the daily papers until something better came along. If Bechamel (detestable person) had kept his promises, instead of behaving with unspeakable horridness, all would have been well. Now her only hope was that liberal-minded woman, Miss Mergle, who, a year ago, had sent her out, highly educated, into the world. Miss Mergle had told her at parting to live fearlessly and truly, and had further given her a volume of Emerson's Essays and Motley's "Dutch Republic," to help her through the rapids of adolescence.

Jessie's feelings for her stepmother's household at Surbiton amounted to an active detestation. There are no graver or more solemn women in the world than these clever girls whose scholastic advancement has retarded their feminine coquetry. In spite of the advanced tone of "Thomas Plantagenet's" anti-marital novel, Jessie had speedily seen through that amiable woman's amiable defences. The variety of pose necessitated by the *corps* of "Men" annoyed her to an altogether unreasonable degree. To return to this life of ridiculous unreality—unconditional capitulation to "Conventionality"—was an exasperating prospect. Yet what else was there to do?

You will understand, therefore, that at times she was moody (and Mr. Hoopdriver respectfully silent

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and attentive) and at times inclined to eloquent denunciation of the existing order of things. She was a Socialist, Hoopdriver learned, and he gave a vague intimation that he went further, intending thereby no less than the horrors of anarchism. He would have owned up to the destruction of the Winter Palace indeed, had he had the faintest idea where the Winter Palace was, and had his assurance amounted to certainty that the Winter Palace was destroyed. He agreed with her cordially that the position of women was intolerable, but checked himself on the verge of the proposition that a girl ought not to expect a fellow to hand down boxes for her when he was getting the "swap" from a customer. It was Jessie's preoccupation with her own perplexities, no doubt, that delayed the unveiling of Mr. Hoopdriver all through Saturday and Sunday. Once or twice, however, there were incidents that put him about terribly—even questions that savoured of suspicion.

On Sunday night, for no conceivable reason, an unwonted wakefulness came upon him. Unaccountably he realised he was a contemptible liar. All through the small hours of Monday he reviewed the tale of his falsehoods, and when he tried to turn his mind from that, the financial problem suddenly rose upon him. He heard two o'clock strike, and three. It is odd how unhappy some of us are at times, when we are at our happiest.

ABASEMENT OF MR. HOOPDRIVER

XXXIV

“GOOD morning, Madam,” said Hoopdriver, as Jessie came into the breakfast room of the Golden Pheasant on Monday morning, and he smiled, bowed, rubbed his hands together, and pulled out a chair for her and rubbed his hands again.

She stopped abruptly, with a puzzled expression on her face. “Where *have* I seen that before?” she said.

“The chair?” said Hoopdriver, flushing.

“No—the attitude.”

She came forward and shook hands with him, looking the while curiously into his face. “And—Madam?”

“It’s a habit,” said Mr. Hoopdriver, guiltily. “A bad habit. Calling ladies Madam. You must put it down to our colonial roughness. Out there—up country—y’know—the ladies—so rare—we call ’em all Madam.”

“You *have* some funny habits, brother Chris,” said Jessie. “Before you sell your diamond shares and go into society, as you say, and stand for Parliament—What a fine thing it is to be a man!—you must cure yourself. That habit of bowing as you do, and rubbing your hands, and looking expectant.”

“It’s a habit.”

“I know. But I don’t think it a good one. You don’t mind my telling you?”

“Not a bit. I’m grateful.”

“I’m blessed or afflicted with a trick of observation,” said Jessie, looking at the breakfast table. Mr. Hoopdriver put his hand to his moustache and then,

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thinking this might be another habit, checked his arm and stuck his hand into his pocket. He felt, to use his private formula, juiced awkward. Jessie's eye wandered to the arm-chair, where a piece of binding was loose, and, possibly to carry out her theory of an observant disposition, she turned and asked him for a pin.

Mr. Hoopdriver's hand fluttered instinctively to his lapel, and there, planted by habit, were a couple of stray pins he had impounded.

"What an odd place to put pins!" exclaimed Jessie, taking it.

"It's 'andy," said Mr. Hoopdriver. "I saw a chap in a shop do it once."

"You must have a careful disposition," she said, over her shoulder, kneeling down to the chair.

"In the centre of Africa—up country, that is—one learns to value pins," said Mr. Hoopdriver, after a perceptible pause. "There weren't over many pins in Africa. They don't lie about on the ground there." His face was now in a fine, red glow. Where would the draper break out next? He thrust his hands into his coat pockets, then took one out again, furtively removed the second pin and dropped it behind him gently. It fell with a loud "ping" on the fender. Happily she made no remark, being preoccupied with the binding of the chair.

Mr. Hoopdriver, instead of sitting down, went up to the table and stood against it, with his finger-tips upon the cloth. They were keeping breakfast a tremendous time. He took up his rolled serviette, looked closely and scrutinisingly at the ring, then

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put his hand under the fold of the napkin and examined the texture, and put the thing down again. Then he had a vague impulse to finger his hollow wisdom tooth—happily checked. He suddenly discovered he was standing as if the table was a counter, and sat down forthwith. He drummed with his hand on the table. He felt dreadfully hot and self-conscious.

“Breakfast is late,” said Jessie, standing up.

“Isn’t it?”

Conversation was slack. Jessie wanted to know the distance to Ringwood. Then silence fell again. Mr. Hoopdriver, very uncomfortable and studying an easy bearing, looked again at the breakfast things and then idly lifted the corner of the tablecloth on the ends of his fingers, and regarded it. “Fifteen three,” he thought, privately.

“Why do you do that?” said Jessie.

“*What?*” said Hoopdriver, dropping the tablecloth convulsively.

“Look at the cloth like that. I saw you do it yesterday, too.”

Mr. Hoopdriver’s face became quite a bright red. He began pulling his moustache nervously. “I know,” he said. “I know. It’s a queer habit, I know. But out there, you know, there’s native servants, you know, and—it’s a queer thing to talk about—but one has to look at things to see, don’t y’know, whether they’re quite clean or not. It’s got to be a habit.”

“How odd!” said Jessie.

“Isn’t it?” mumbled Hoopdriver.

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"If I were a Sherlock Holmes," said Jessie, "I suppose I could have told you were a colonial from little things like that. But anyhow, I guessed it, didn't I?"

"Yes," said Hoopdriver, in a melancholy tone, "you guessed it."

Why not seize the opportunity for a neat confession, and add, "unhappily in this case you guessed wrong." Did she suspect? Then, at the psychological moment, the girl bumped the door open with her tray and brought in the coffee and scrambled eggs.

"I am rather lucky with my intuitions sometimes," said Jessie.

Remorse that had been accumulating in his mind for two days surged now to the surface. What a shabby liar he was!

And besides, he must sooner or later, inevitably, give himself away.

XXXV

MR. HOOPDRIVER helped the eggs and then, instead of beginning, sat with his cheek on his hand, watching Jessie pour out the coffee. His ears were a bright red, and his eyes bright. He took his coffee cup clumsily, cleared his throat, suddenly leaned back in his chair, and thrust his hands deep into his pockets. "I'll do it," he said aloud.

"Do what?" said Jessie, looking up in surprise over the coffee pot. She was just beginning her scrambled egg.

"Own up."

"Own what?"

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“Miss Milton—I’m a liar.”

He put his head on one side and regarded her with a frown of tremendous resolution. Then in measured accents, and moving his head slowly from side to side, he announced, “Ay’m a deraper.”

“You’re a draper? I thought——”

“You thought wrong. But it’s bound to come up. Pins, attitude, habits— It’s plain enough.

“I’m a draper’s assistant let out for a ten-days holiday. Jest a draper’s assistant. Not much, is it? A counter-jumper.”

“A draper’s assistant isn’t a position to be ashamed of,” she said, recovering, and not quite understanding yet what this all meant.

“Yes, it is,” he said, “for a man, in this country now. To be just another man’s hand, as I am. To have to wear what clothes you are told, and go to church to please customers, and work— There’s no other kind of men stand such hours. A drunken bricklayer’s a king to it.”

“But why are you telling me this now?”

“It’s important you should know at once.”

“But, Mr. Benson——”

“That isn’t all. If you don’t mind my speaking about myself a bit, there’s a few things I’d like to tell you. I can’t go on deceiving you. My name’s not Benson. *Why* I told you Benson, I *don’t* know. Except that I’m a kind of fool. Well—I wanted somehow to seem more than I was. My name’s Hoop-driver.”

“Yes?”

“And that about South Africa—and that lion.”

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“Well?”

“Lies.”

“Lies!”

“And the discovery of diamonds on the ostrich farm. Lies too. And all the reminiscences of the giraffes—lies too. I never rode on no giraffes. I’d be afraid.”

He looked at her with a kind of sullen satisfaction. He had eased his conscience, anyhow. She regarded him in infinite perplexity. This was a new side altogether to the man. “But *why?*” she began.

“Why did I tell you such things? *I don’t know.* Silly sort of chap, I expect. I suppose I wanted to impress you. But somehow, now, I want you to know the truth.”

Silence. Breakfast untouched. “I thought I’d tell you,” said Mr. Hoopdriver. “I suppose it’s snobbishness and all that kind of thing, as much as anything. I lay awake pretty near all last night thinking about myself; thinking what a got-up imitation of a man I was, and all that.”

“And you haven’t any diamond shares, and you are not going into Parliament, and you’re not——”

“All Lies,” said Hoopdriver, in a sepulchral voice. “Lies from beginning to end. ’Ow I came to tell ’em *I don’t know.*”

She stared at him blankly.

“I never set eyes on Africa in my life,” said Mr. Hoopdriver, completing the confession. Then he pulled his right hand from his pocket, and with the nonchalance of one to whom the bitterness of death is passed, began to drink his coffee.

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"It's a little surprising," began Jessie, vaguely.

"Think it over," said Mr. Hoopdriver. "I'm sorry from the bottom of my heart."

And then breakfast proceeded in silence. Jessie ate very little, and seemed lost in thought. Mr. Hoopdriver was so overcome by contrition and anxiety that he consumed an extraordinarily large breakfast out of pure nervousness, and ate his scrambled eggs for the most part with the spoon that belonged properly to the marmalade. His eyes were gloomily downcast. She glanced at him through her eyelashes. Once or twice she struggled with laughter, once or twice she seemed to be indignant.

"I don't know what to think," she said at last. "I don't know what to make of you—brother Chris. I thought, do you know? that you were perfectly honest. And somehow——"

"Well?"

"I think so still."

"Honest—with all those lies!"

"I wonder."

"I don't," said Mr. Hoopdriver. "I'm fair ashamed of myself. But anyhow—I've stopped deceiving you."

"I *thought*," said the Young Lady in Grey, "that story of the lion——"

"Lord!" said Mr. Hoopdriver. "Don't remind me of *that*."

"I thought, somehow, I *felt*, that the things you said didn't ring quite true." She suddenly broke out in laughter, at the expression of his face. "Of *course* you are honest," she said. "How could I ever

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doubt it? As if *I* had never pretended! I see it all now."

Abruptly she rose, and extended her hand across the breakfast things. He looked at her doubtfully, and saw the dancing friendliness in her eyes. He scarcely understood at first. He rose, holding the marmalade spoon, and took her proffered hand with abject humility. "Lord!" he broke out, "if you aren't enough—but there!"

"I see it all now." A brilliant inspiration had suddenly obscured her humour. She sat down suddenly, and he sat down too. "You did it," she said, "because you wanted to help me. And you thought I was too Conventional to take help from one I might think my social inferior."

"That was partly it," said Mr. Hoopdriver.

"How you misunderstood me!" she said.

"You don't mind?"

"It was noble of you. But I am sorry," she said, "you should think me likely to be ashamed of you because you follow a decent trade."

"I didn't know at first, you see," said Mr. Hoopdriver.

And he submitted meekly to a restoration of his self-respect. He was as useful a citizen as could be,—it was proposed and carried,—and his lying was of the noblest. And so the breakfast concluded much more happily than his brightest expectation, and they rode out of ruddy little Blandford as though no shadow of any sort had come between them.

ABASEMENT OF MR. HOOPDRIVER

XXXVI

As they were sitting by the roadside among the pine-trees half-way up a stretch of hill between Wimborne and Ringwood, however, Mr. Hoopdriver reopened the question of his worldly position.

“Ju think,” he began abruptly, removing a meditative cigarette from his mouth, “that a draper’s shopman is a decent citizen?”

“Why not?”

“When he puts people off with what they don’t quite want, for instance?”

“Need he do that?”

“Salesmanship,” said Hoopdriver. “Wouldn’t get a crib if he didn’t— It’s no good your arguing. It’s not a particularly honest nor a particularly useful trade; it’s not very high up; there’s no freedom and no leisure—seven to eight-thirty every day in the week don’t leave much edge to live on, does it?—real workmen laugh at us and educated chaps like bank clerks and solicitors’ clerks look down on us. You look respectable outside, and inside you are packed in dormitories like convicts, fed on bread and butter and bullied like slaves. You’re just superior enough to feel that you’re not superior. Without capital there’s no prospects; one draper in a hundred don’t even earn enough to marry on; and if he *does* marry, his G. V. can just use him to black boots if he likes, and he daren’t put his back up. That’s drapery! And you tell me to be contented. Would *you* be contented if you was a shop girl?”

She did not answer. She looked at him with distress

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in her brown eyes, and he remained gloomily in possession of the field.

Presently he spoke. "I've been thinking," he said, and stopped.

She turned her face, resting her cheek on the palm of her hand. There was a light in her eyes that made the expression of them tender. Mr. Hoopdriver had not looked in her face while he had talked. He had regarded the grass, and pointed his remarks with red-knuckled hands held open and palms upwards. Now they hung limply over his knees.

"Well?" she said.

"I was thinking it this morning," said Mr. Hoopdriver.

"Yes?"

"Of course it's silly."

"Well?"

"It's like this. I'm twenty-three, about. I had my schooling all right to fifteen, say. Well, that leaves me eight years behind—is it too late? I wasn't so backward. I did algebra, and Latin up to auxiliary verbs, and French genders. I got a kind of grounding."

"And now you mean, should you go on working?"

"Yes," said Mr. Hoopdriver. "That's it. You can't do much at drapery without capital, you know. But if I could get really ejuated. . . . I've thought sometimes . . ."

"Why not?" said the Young Lady in Grey.

Mr. Hoopdriver was surprised to see it in that light. "You think?" he said.

"Of course. You are a Man. You are free—"

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She warmed. "I wish I were you to have the chance of that struggle."

"Am I Man *enough*?" said Mr. Hoopdriver aloud, but addressing himself. "There's that eight years," he said to her.

"You can make it up. What you call educated men— They're not going on. You can catch them. They are quite satisfied. Playing golf, and thinking of clever things to say to women like my stepmother, and dining out. You're in front of them already in one thing. They think they know everything. You don't. And they know such little things."

"Lord!" said Mr. Hoopdriver. "How you encourage a fellow!"

"If I could only help you," she said, and left an eloquent hiatus. He became pensive again.

"It's pretty evident you don't think much of a draper," he said abruptly.

Another interval. "Hundreds of men," she said, "have come from the very lowest ranks of life. There was Burns, a ploughman; and Hugh Miller, a stonemason; and plenty of others. Dodsley was a footman——"

"But drapers! We're too—sort of shabby genteel to rise. Our coats and cuffs might get crumpled——"

"Wasn't there a Clarke who wrote theology? He was a draper."

"There was one started a sewing cotton, the only one I ever heard tell of."

"Have you ever read 'Hearts Insurgent'?"

"Never," said Mr. Hoopdriver. He did not wait for her context, but suddenly broke out with an ac-

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count of his literary requirements. "The fact is—I've read precious little. One don't get much of a chance, situated as I am. We have a library at business, and I've gone through that. Most Besant I've read, and a lot of Miss Braddon's and Rider Haggard and Marie Corelli—and, well—a Ouida or so. They're good stories, of course, and first-class writers, but they didn't seem to have much to do with me. But there's heaps of books one hears talked about, I *haven't* read."

"Don't you read any other books but novels?"

"Scarcely ever. One gets tired after business, and you can't get the books. I have been to some extension lectures, of course, 'Elizabethan Dramatists,' it was, but it seemed a little high-flown, you know. And I went and did wood-carving at the same place. But it didn't seem leading nowhere, and I cut my thumb and chucked it."

He made a depressing spectacle, with his face anxious and his hands limp. "It makes me *sick*," he said, "to think how I've been fooled with. My old schoolmaster ought to have a juiced *hiding*. He's a thief. He pretended to undertake to make a man of me, and he's stole twenty-three years of my life, filled me up with scraps and sweepings. Here I am! I don't *know* anything, and I can't *do* anything, and all the learning time is over."

"Is it?" she said; but he did not seem to hear her.

"My o' people didn't know any better, and went and paid thirty pounds premium—thirty pounds down—to have me made *this*. The G. V. promised to teach me the trade, and he never taught me

ABASEMENT OF MR. HOOPDRIVER

anything but to be a Hand. It's the way they do with draper's apprentices. If every swindler was locked up—well, you'd have nowhere to buy tape and cotton. It's all very well to bring up Burns and those chaps, but I'm not that make. Yet I'm not such muck that I might not have been better—with teaching. I wonder what the chaps who sneer and laugh at such as me would be if they'd been fooled about as I've been. At twenty-three—it's a long start."

He looked up with a wintry smile, a sadder and wiser Hoopdriver indeed than him of the glorious imaginings. "It's *you* done this," he said. "You're real. And it sets me thinking what I really am, and what I might have been. Suppose it was all different——"

"*Make* it different."

"How?"

"*Work*. Stop playing at life. Face it like a man."

"Ah!" said Hoopdriver, glancing at her out of the corners of his eyes. "And even then——"

"No! It's not much good. I'm beginning too late."

And there, in blankly thoughtful silence, that conversation ended.

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XXXVII

AT Ringwood they lunched, and Jessie met with a disappointment. There was no letter for her at the post office. Opposite the hotel, The Chequered Career, was a machine shop with a conspicuously second-hand Marlborough Club tandem tricycle displayed in the window, together with the announcement that bicycles and tricycles were on hire within. The establishment was impressed on Mr. Hoopdriver's mind by the proprietor's action in coming across the road and narrowly inspecting their machines. His action revived a number of disagreeable impressions, but, happily, came to nothing. While they were still lunching, a tall clergyman with a heated face entered the room and sat down at the table next to theirs. He was in a kind of holiday costume; that is to say, he had a more than usually high collar fastened behind and rather the worse for the weather, and his long-tail coat had been replaced by a black jacket of quite remarkable brevity. He had faded brown shoes on his feet, his trouser legs were grey with dust, and he wore a hat of piebald straw in the place of the customary soft felt. He was evidently socially inclined.

"A most charming day, sir," he said, in a ringing tenor.

"Charming," said Mr. Hoopdriver, over a portion of pie.

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"You are, I perceive, cycling through this delightful country," said the clergyman.

"Touring," explained Mr. Hoopdriver.

"I can imagine that, with a properly oiled machine, there can be no easier nor pleasanter way of seeing the country."

"No," said Mr. Hoopdriver; "it isn't half a bad way of getting about."

"For a young and newly married couple, a tandem bicycle must be, I should imagine, a delightful bond."

"Quite so," said Mr. Hoopdriver, reddening a little.

"Do you ride a tandem?"

"No—we're separate," said Mr. Hoopdriver.

"The motion through the air is indisputably of a very exhilarating description." With that decision, the clergyman turned to give his orders to the attendant in a firm, authoritative voice, for a cup of tea, two gelatine lozenges, bread and butter, salad, and pie to follow. "The gelatine lozenges I must have. I require them to precipitate the tannin in my tea," he remarked to the room at large, and folding his hands, remained for some time with his chin thereon, staring fixedly at a little picture over Mr. Hoopdriver's head.

"I myself am a cyclist," said the clergyman, descending suddenly upon Mr. Hoopdriver.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Hoopdriver, attacking the moustache. "What machine, may I ask?"

"I have recently become possessed of a tricycle. A bicycle is, I regret to say, considered too—how shall I put it?—*flippant* by my parishioners. So I have a tricycle. I have just been hauling it hither."

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“Hauling!” said Jessie, surprised.

“With a shoe lace. And partly carrying it on my back.”

The pause was unexpected. Jessie had some trouble with a crumb. Mr. Hoopdriver’s face passed through several phases of surprise. Then he saw the explanation. “Had an accident?”

“I can hardly call it an accident. The wheels suddenly refused to go round. I found myself about five miles from here with an absolutely immobile machine.”

“Ow!” said Mr. Hoopdriver, trying to seem intelligent, and Jessie glanced at this insane person.

“It appears,” said the clergyman, satisfied with the effect he had created, “that my man carefully washed out the bearings with paraffin, and let the machine dry without oiling it again. The consequence was that they became heated to a considerable temperature and jammed. Even at the outset the machine ran stiffly as well as noisily, and I, being inclined to ascribe this stiffness to my own lassitude, merely redoubled my exertions.”

“Ot work all round,” said Mr. Hoopdriver.

“You could scarcely put it more appropriately. It is my rule of life to do whatever I find to do with all my might. I believe, indeed, that the bearings became red hot. Finally one of the wheels jammed together. A side wheel it was, so that its stoppage necessitated an inversion of the entire apparatus,—an inversion in which I participated.”

“Meaning, that you went over?” said Mr. Hoopdriver, suddenly much amused.

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“Precisely. And not brooking my defeat, I suffered repeatedly. You may understand, perhaps, a natural impatience. I expostulated—playfully, of course. Happily the road was not overlooked. Finally the entire apparatus became rigid, and I abandoned the unequal contest. For all practical purposes the tricycle was no better than a heavy chair without casters. It was a case of hauling or carrying.”

The clergyman’s nutriment appeared in the doorway.

“Five miles,” said the clergyman.

He began at once to eat bread and butter vigorously. “Happily,” he said, “I am an eupeptic, energetic sort of person—on principle. I would all men were likewise.”

“It’s the best way,” agreed Mr. Hoopdriver, and the conversation gave precedence to bread and butter.

“Gelatine,” said the clergyman presently, stirring his tea thoughtfully, “precipitates the tannin in one’s tea and renders it easy of digestion.”

“That’s a useful sort of thing to know,” said Mr. Hoopdriver.

“You are altogether welcome,” said the clergyman, biting generously at two pieces of bread and butter folded together.

In the afternoon our two wanderers rode on at an easy pace towards Stoney Cross. Conversation languished, the topic of South Africa being in abeyance. Mr. Hoopdriver was silenced by disagreeable thoughts. He had changed the last sovereign at Ringwood. The fact had come upon him suddenly.

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Now too late he was reflecting upon his resources. There was twenty pounds or more in the post-office savings bank in Putney, but his book was locked up in his box at the Antrobus establishment. Else this infatuated man would certainly have surreptitiously withdrawn the entire sum in order to prolong these journeyings even for a few days. As it was, the shadow of the end fell across his happiness. Strangely enough, in spite of his anxiety and the morning's collapse, he was still in a curious emotional state that was certainly not misery. He was forgetting his imaginings and posings, forgetting himself altogether in his growing appreciation of his companion. The most tangible trouble in his mind was the necessity of breaking the matter to her.

A long stretch uphill tired them long before Stoney Cross was reached, and they dismounted and sat under the shade of a little oak-tree. Near the crest the road looped on itself, so that, looking back, it sloped below them up to the right and then came towards them. About them grew a rich heather. Stunted oaks stood along the edge of a deep ditch by the roadside, and the road was sandy; but below the steepness of the hill where the clustering trees stood thick and tall, it was grey and barred with shadows. Mr. Hoopdriver fumbled clumsily with his cigarettes.

"There's a thing I got to tell you," he said, trying to be perfectly calm.

"Yes?" she said.

"I'd like to jest discuss your plans a bit, y'know."

"I'm very unsettled," said Jessie.

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“You are thinking of writing Books?”

“Or doing Journalism, or teaching, or something like that.”

“And keeping yourself independent of your step-mother?”

“Yes.”

“How long'd it take now, to get anything of that sort to do?”

“I don't know at all. I believe there are a great many women journalists and sanitary inspectors, and black-and-white artists. But I suppose it takes time. Women, you know, edit most papers nowadays, George Egerton says. I ought, I suppose, to communicate with a literary agent.”

“Of course,” said Hoopdriver, “it's very suitable work. Not being heavy like the drapery.”

“There's heavy brain labour, you must remember.”

“That wouldn't hurt *you*,” said Mr. Hoopdriver, turning a compliment.

“It's like this,” he said, ending a pause. “It's a juiced nuisance alluding to these matters, but—we got very little more money.”

He perceived that Jessie started, though he did not look at her. “I was counting, of course, on your friend's writing and your being able to take some action to-day.” “Take some action” was a phrase he had learned at his last “swop.”

“Money,” said Jessie. “I didn't think of money.”

“Hullo! Here's a tandem bicycle,” said Mr. Hoopdriver abruptly, and pointing with his cigarette.

She looked, and saw two little figures emerging from among the trees at the foot of the slope. The

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riders were bowed sternly over their work and made a gallant but unsuccessful attempt to take the rise. The machine was evidently too highly geared for hill climbing, and presently the rearmost rider rose on his saddle and hopped off, leaving his companion to any fate he found proper. The foremost rider was a man unused to such machines and apparently undecided how to dismount. He wobbled a few yards up the hill with a long tail of machine wobbling behind him. Finally he made an attempt to jump off as one does off a single bicycle, hit his boot against the backbone, and collapsed heavily, falling on his shoulder.

She stood up. "Dear me!" she said. "I hope he isn't hurt."

The second rider went to the assistance of the fallen man.

Hoopdriver stood up too.

The lank, shaky machine was lifted up and wheeled out of the way, and then the fallen rider, being assisted, got up slowly and stood rubbing his arm. No serious injury seemed to be done to the man, and the couple presently turned their attention to the machine by the roadside. They were not in cycling clothes, Hoopdriver observed. One wore the grotesque raiment for which the Cockney discovery of the game of golf seems indirectly blamable. Even at this distance the flopping flatness of his cap, the bright brown leather at the top of his calves, and the chequering of his stockings were perceptible. The other, the rear rider, was a slender little man in grey.

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“Amatoors,” said Mr. Hoopdriver.

Jessie stood staring, and a veil of thought dropped over her eyes. She no longer regarded the two men who were now tinkering at the machine down below there.

“How much have you?” she said.

He thrust his right hand into his pocket and produced six coins, counted them with his left index finger, and held them out to her. “Thirteen four half,” said Mr. Hoopdriver. “Every penny.”

“I have half a sovereign,” she said.

“Our bill wherever we stop—” The hiatus was more eloquent than many words.

“I never thought of money coming in to stop us like this,” said Jessie.

“It’s a juiced nuisance.”

“Money,” said Jessie. “Is it possible— Surely! Conventionality! May only people of means— Live their own Lives? I never thought . . .”

Pause.

“Here’s some more cyclists coming,” said Mr. Hoopdriver.

The two men were both busy with their bicycle still, but now from among the trees emerged the massive bulk of a “Marlborough Club” tandem, ridden by a slender woman in grey and a burly man in a Norfolk jacket. Following close upon this came a lank black figure in a piebald straw hat, riding a tricycle of antiquated pattern with two large wheels in front. The man in grey remained bowed over the bicycle, with his stomach resting on the saddle, but his companion stood up and addressed some remark

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to the tricycle riders. Then it seemed as if he pointed uphill to where Mr. Hoopdriver and his companion stood side by side. A still odder thing followed; the lady in grey took out her handkerchief, appeared to wave it for a moment, and then at a hasty motion from her companion the white signal vanished.

“Surely,” said Jessie, peering under her hand. “It’s never——”

The tandem tricycle began to ascend the hill, quivering elaborately from side to side to ease the ascent. It was evident from his heaving shoulders and depressed head that the burly gentleman was exerting himself. The clerical person on the tricycle assumed the shape of a note of interrogation. Then on the heels of this procession came a dog-cart driven by a man in a billycock hat and containing a lady in dark green.

“Looks like some sort of excursion,” said Hoopdriver.

Jessie did not answer. She was still peering under her hand. “Surely,” she said.

The clergyman’s efforts were becoming convulsive. With a curious jerking motion, the tricycle he rode twisted round upon itself, and he partly dismounted and partly fell off. He turned his machine uphill again immediately and began to wheel it. Then the burly gentleman dismounted, and with a courtly attentiveness assisted the lady in grey to alight. There was some little difference of opinion as to assistance, she so clearly wished to help push. Finally she gave in, and the burly gentleman began impelling the machine uphill by his own unaided strength. His

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face made a dot of brilliant colour among the greys and greens at the foot of the hill. The tandem bicycle was now, it seems, repaired, and this joined the tail of the procession, its riders walking behind the dog-cart, from which the lady in green and the driver had now descended.

“Mr. Hoopdriver,” said Jessie. “Those people—I’m almost sure——”

“Lord!” said Mr. Hoopdriver, reading the rest in her face, and he turned to pick up his machine at once. Then he dropped it and assisted her to mount.

At the sight of Jessie mounting against the sky line the people coming up the hill suddenly became excited and ended Jessie’s doubts at once. Two handkerchiefs waved, and some one shouted. The riders of the tandem bicycle began to run it uphill, past the other vehicles. But our young people did not wait for further developments of the pursuit. In another moment they were out of sight, riding hard down a steady incline towards Stoney Cross.

Before they had dropped among the trees out of sight of the hill brow, Jessie looked back and saw the tandem rising over the crest, with its rear rider just tumbling into the saddle. “They’re coming,” she said, and bent her head over her handles in true professional style.

They whirled down into the valley over a white bridge, and saw ahead of them a number of shaggy little ponies frisking in the roadway. Involuntarily they slackened. “Shoo!” said Mr. Hoopdriver, and the ponies kicked up their heels derisively. At that Mr. Hoopdriver lost his temper and charged at

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them, narrowly missed one, and sent them jumping the ditch into the bracken under the trees, leaving the way clear for Jessie.

Then the road rose quietly but persistently; the treadles grew heavy, and Mr. Hoopdriver's breath sounded like a saw. The tandem appeared, making frightful exertions, at the foot, while the chase was still climbing. Then, thank Heaven! a crest and a stretch of up and down road, whose only disadvantage was its pitiless exposure to the afternoon sun. The tandem apparently dismounted at the hill, and did not appear against the hot blue sky until they were already near some trees and a good mile away.

"We're gaining," said Mr. Hoopdriver, with a little Niagara of perspiration dropping from brow to cheek. "That hill——"

But that was their only gleam of success. They were both nearly spent. Hoopdriver, indeed, was quite spent, and only a feeling of shame prolonged the liquidation of his bankrupt physique. From that point the tandem gained upon them steadily. At the Rufus Stone, it was scarcely a hundred yards behind. Then one desperate spurt, and they found themselves upon a steady downhill stretch among thick pine woods. Downhill nothing can beat a highly geared tandem bicycle. Automatically Mr. Hoopdriver put up his feet, and Jessie slackened her pace. In another moment they heard the swish of the fat pneumatics behind them, and the tandem passed Hoopdriver and drew alongside Jessie. Hoopdriver felt a mad impulse to collide with this abominable machine as it passed him. His only consolation was to notice

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that its riders, riding violently, were quite as dishevelled as himself and smothered in sandy white dust.

Abruptly Jessie stopped and dismounted, and the tandem riders shot panting past them downhill. "Brake!" said Dangle, who was riding behind, and stood up on the pedals. For a moment the velocity of the thing increased, and then they saw the dust fly from the brake, as it came down on the front tire. Dangle's right leg floundered in the air as he came off in the road. The tandem wobbled. "Hold it!" cried Phipps over his shoulder, going on downhill. "I can't get off if you don't hold it." He put on the brake until the machine stopped almost dead, and then feeling unstable began to pedal again. Dangle shouted after him. "Put out your foot, man," said Dangle.

In this way the tandem riders were carried a good hundred yards or more beyond their quarry. Then Phipps realised his possibilities, slacked up with the brake, and let the thing go over sideways, dropping on to his right foot. With his left leg still over the saddle, and still holding the handles, he looked over his shoulder and began addressing uncomplimentary remarks to Dangle. "You only think of yourself," said Phipps, with a florid face.

"They have forgotten us," said Jessie, turning her machine.

"There was a road at the top of the hill—to Lyndhurst," said Hoopdriver, following her example.

"It's no good. There's the money. We must give it up. But let us go back to that hotel at Rufus Stone. I don't see why we should be led captive."

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So to the consternation of the tandem riders, Jessie and her companion mounted and rode quietly back up the hill again. As they dismounted at the hotel entrance, the tandem overtook them, and immediately afterwards the dog-cart came into view in pursuit. Dangle jumped off.

"Miss Milton, I believe," said Dangle, panting and raising a damp cap from his wet and matted hair.

"I *say*," said Phipps, receding involuntarily. "Don't go doing it again, Dangle. *Help* a chap."

"One minute," said Dangle, and ran after his colleague.

Jessie leaned her machine against the wall, and went into the hotel entrance. Hoopdriver remained in the hotel entrance, limp but defiant.

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XXXVIII

HE folded his arms as Dangle and Phipps returned towards him. Phipps was abashed by his inability to cope with the tandem, which he was now wheeling, but Dangle was inclined to be quarrelsome. "Miss Milton?" he said briefly.

Mr. Hoopdriver bowed over his folded arms.

"Miss Milton within?" said Dangle.

"*And* not to be disturbed," said Mr. Hoopdriver.

"You are a scoundrel, sir," said Mr. Dangle.

"Et your service," said Mr. Hoopdriver. "She awaits 'er stepmother, sir."

Mr. Dangle hesitated. "She will be here immediately," he said. "Here is her friend, Miss Mergle."

Mr. Hoopdriver unfolded his arms slowly, and, with an air of immense calm, thrust his hands into his breeches pockets. Then with one of those fatal hesitations of his, it occurred to him that this attitude was merely vulgarly defiant; he withdrew both, returned one and pulled at the insufficient moustache with the other. Miss Mergle caught him in confusion. "Is this the man?" she said to Dangle, and forthwith, "How *dare* you, sir? How dare you face me? That poor girl!"

"You will permit me to observe," began Mr. Hoopdriver with a splendid drawl, seeing himself, for the first time in all this business, as a romantic villain.

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"Ugh," said Miss Mergle, unexpectedly striking him about the midriff with her extended palms, and sending him staggering backward into the hall of the hotel.

"Let me pass!" said Miss Mergle, in towering indignation. "How dare you resist my passage?" and so swept by him and into the dining-room, wherein Jessie had sought refuge.

As Mr. Hoopdriver struggled for equilibrium with the umbrella-stand, Dangle and Phipps, roused from their inertia by Miss Mergle's activity, came in upon her heels, Phipps leading. "How dare you prevent that lady passing?" said Phipps.

Mr. Hoopdriver looked obstinate, and, to Dangle's sense, dangerous, but he made no answer. A waiter in full bloom appeared at the end of the passage, guardant. "It is men of your stamp, sir," said Phipps, "who discredit manhood."

Mr. Hoopdriver thrust his hands into his pockets. "Who the juice are you?" shouted Mr. Hoopdriver, fiercely.

"Who are *you*, sir?" retorted Phipps. "Who are *you*? That's the question. What are *you*, and what are you doing, wandering at large with a young lady under age?"

"Don't speak to him," said Dangle.

"I'm not a-going to tell all my secrets to any one who comes at me," said Hoopdriver. "Not likely." And added fiercely, "And that I tell you, sir."

He and Phipps stood, legs apart and looking exceedingly fierce at each other. Heaven alone knows what might not have happened if the long

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clergyman had not appeared in the doorway, heated but deliberate. "Petticoated anachronism," said the long clergyman in the doorway, apparently still suffering from the antiquated prejudice that demanded a third wheel and a black coat from a clerical rider. He looked at Phipps and Hoopdriver for a moment, then extending his hand towards the latter, he waved it up and down three times, saying, "Tchak, tchak, tchak," very deliberately as he did so. Then with a concluding "Ugh!" and a gesture of repugnance he passed on into the dining-room from which the voice of Miss Mergle was distinctly audible remarking that the weather was extremely hot even for the time of year.

This expression of disapprobation had a very demoralising effect upon Hoopdriver, a demoralisation that was immediately completed by the advent of the massive Widgery.

"Is this the man?" said Widgery very grimly, and producing a special voice for the occasion from somewhere deep in his neck.

"Don't hurt him!" said Mrs. Milton, with clasped hands. "However much wrong he has done her—No violence!"

"'Ow many more of you?" said Hoopdriver, at bay before the umbrella-stand.

"Where is she? What has he done with her?" said Mrs. Milton.

"I'm not going to stand here and be insulted by a lot of strangers," said Mr. Hoopdriver. "So you needn't think it."

"Please don't worry, Mr. Hoopdriver," said Jessie,

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suddenly appearing in the door of the dining-room. "I'm here, mother." Her face was white.

Mrs. Milton said something about her child, and made an emotional charge at Jessie. The embrace vanished into the dining-room. Widgery moved as if to follow, and hesitated. "You'd better make yourself scarce," he said to Mr. Hoopdriver.

"I shan't do anything of the kind," said Mr. Hoopdriver, with a catching of the breath. "I'm here defending that young lady."

"You've done her enough mischief, I should think," said Widgery, suddenly walking towards the dining-room and closing the door behind him, leaving Dangle and Phipps with Hoopdriver.

"Clear!" said Phipps, threateningly.

"I shall go and sit out in the garden," said Mr. Hoopdriver, with dignity. "There I shall remain."

"Don't make a row with him," said Dangle.

And Mr. Hoopdriver retired, unassaulted, in almost sobbing dignity.

XXXIX

So here is the world with us again, and our sentimental excursion is over. In the front of the Rufus Stone Hotel conceive a remarkable collection of wheeled instruments, watched over by Dangle and Phipps in grave and stately attitudes, and by the driver of a stylish dog-cart from Ringwood. In the garden behind, in an attitude of nervous prostration, Mr. Hoopdriver was seated on a rustic seat. Through the open window of a private sitting-room came a murmur of voices, as of men and women in confer-

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ence. Occasionally something that might have been a girlish sob.

"I fail to see what status Widgery has," says Dangle, "thrusting himself in there."

"He takes too much upon himself," said Phipps.

"I've been noticing little things, yesterday and to-day," said Dangle, and stopped.

"They went to the cathedral together in the afternoon."

"Financially it would be a good thing for her, of course," said Dangle, with a gloomy magnanimity. He felt drawn to Phipps now by the common trouble, in spite of the man's chequered legs. "Financially it wouldn't be half bad."

"He's so dull and heavy," said Phipps.

Meanwhile, within, the clergyman had, by promptitude and dexterity, taken the chair and was opening the case against the unfortunate Jessie. I regret to have to say that my heroine had been appalled by the visible array of public opinion against her excursion, to the pitch of tears. She was sitting with flushed cheeks and swimming eyes at the end of the table opposite to the clergyman. She held her handkerchief crumpled up in her extended hand. Mrs. Milton sat as near to her as possible, and occasionally made little dabs with her hand at Jessie's hand, to indicate forgiveness. These advances were not reciprocated, which touched Widgery very much. The lady in green, Miss Mergle (B. A.), sat on the opposite side near the clergyman. She was the strong-minded schoolmistress to whom Jessie had written, and who had immediately precipitated the pursuit upon her. She had picked up the clergyman

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in Ringwood, and had told him everything forthwith, having met him once at a British Association meeting. He had immediately constituted himself administrator of the entire business. Widgery, having been foiled in an attempt to conduct the proceedings, stood with his legs wide apart in front of the fireplace ornament, and looked profound and sympathetic. Jessie's account of her adventures was a chary one and given amidst frequent interruptions. She surprised herself by skilfully omitting any allusion to the Bechamel episode. She completely exonerated Hoopdriver from the charge of being more than an accessory to her escapade. But public feeling was heavy against Hoopdriver. Her narrative was inaccurate and sketchy, but happily the others were too anxious to pass opinions to pin her down to particulars. At last they had all the facts they would permit.

"My dear young lady," said the clergyman, "I can only ascribe this extravagant and regrettable expedition of yours to the wildest misconceptions of your place in the world and of your duties and responsibilities. Even now, it seems to me, your present emotion is due not so much to a real and sincere penitence for your disobedience and folly as to a positive annoyance at our most fortunate interference——"

"Not that," said Mrs. Milton, in a low tone. "Not that."

"But *why* did she go off like this?" said Widgery. "That's what *I* want to know."

Jessie made an attempt to speak, but Mrs. Milton

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said "Hush!" and the ringing tenor of the clergyman rode triumphantly over the meeting. "I cannot understand this spirit of unrest that has seized upon the more intelligent portion of the feminine community. You had a pleasant home, a most refined and intelligent lady in the position of your mother, to cherish and protect you——"

"If I *had* a mother," gulped Jessie, succumbing to the obvious snare of self-pity, and sobbing.

"To cherish, protect, and advise you. And you must needs go out of it all alone into a strange world of unknown dangers——"

"I wanted to learn," said Jessie.

"You wanted to learn. May you never have anything to *unlearn*."

"*Ah!*" from Mrs. Milton, very sadly.

"It isn't fair for all of you to argue at me at once," submitted Jessie, irrelevantly.

"A world full of unknown dangers," resumed the clergyman. "Your proper place was surely the natural surroundings that are part of you. You have been unduly influenced, it is only too apparent, by a class of literature which, with all due respect to a distinguished authoress that shall be nameless, I must call the New Woman Literature. In that deleterious ingredient of our book boxes——"

"I don't altogether agree with you there," said Miss Mergle, throwing her head back and regarding him firmly through her spectacles, and Mr. Widgery coughed.

"What *has* all this to do with me?" asked Jessie, availing herself of the interruption.

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“The point is,” said Mrs. Milton, on her defence, “that in my books——”

“All I want to do,” said Jessie, “is to go about freely by myself. Girls do so in America. Why not here?”

“Social conditions are entirely different in America,” said Miss Mergle. “Here we respect Class Distinctions.”

“It’s very unfortunate. What I want to know is, why I cannot go away for a holiday if I want to.”

“With a strange young man, socially your inferior,” said Widgery, and made her flush by his tone.

“Why not?” she said. “With anybody.”

“They don’t do that, even in America,” said Miss Mergle.

“My dear young lady,” said the clergyman, “the most elementary principles of decorum— A day will come when you will better understand how entirely subversive your ideas are to the very fundamentals of our present civilisation, when you will better understand the harrowing anxiety you have given Mrs. Milton by this inexplicable flight of yours. We can only put things down at present, in charity, to your ignorance——”

“You have to consider the general body of opinion, too,” said Widgery.

“Precisely,” said Miss Mergle. “There is no such thing as conduct in the absolute.”

“If once this most unfortunate business gets about,” said the clergyman, “it will do you infinite harm.”

AT THE RUFUS STONE

"But *I've* done nothing wrong. Why should I be responsible for other people's——"

"The world has no charity," said Mrs. Milton.

"For a girl," said Jessie. "No."

"Now do let us stop arguing, my dear young lady, and let us listen to reason. Never mind how or why, this conduct of yours will do you infinite harm if once it is generally known. And not only that, it will cause infinite pain to those who care for you. But if you will return at once to your home, causing it to be understood that you have been with friends for these last few days——"

"Tell lies," said Jessie.

"Certainly not. Most certainly not. But I understand that is how your absence is understood at present, and there is no reason——"

Jessie's grip tightened on her handkerchief. "I won't go back," she said, "to have it as I did before. I want a room of my own, what books I need to read, to be free to go out by myself alone, Teaching——"

"Anything," said Mrs. Milton; "anything in reason."

"But will you keep your promise?" said Jessie.

"Surely you won't dictate to your mother!" said Widgery.

"My stepmother! I don't want to dictate. I want definite promises now."

"This is most unreasonable," said the clergyman.

"Very well," said Jessie, swallowing a sob but with unusual resolution. "Then I won't go back. My life is being frittered away——"

"*Let* her have her way," said Widgery.

THE WHEELS OF CHANCE

"A room then. All your Men. I'm not to come down and talk away half my days——"

"My dear child, if only to save you," said Mrs. Milton.

"If you don't keep your promise——"

"Then I take it the matter is practically concluded," said the clergyman. "And that you very properly submit to return to your proper home. And now, if I may offer a suggestion, it is that we take tea. Freed of its tannin, nothing, I think, is more refreshing and stimulating."

"There's a train from Lyndhurst at thirteen minutes to six," said Widgery, unfolding a time table. "That gives us about half an hour or three-quarters here—if a conveyance is obtainable, that is."

"A gelatine lozenge dropped into the teacup precipitates the tannin in the form of tannate of gelatine," said the clergyman to Miss Mergle, in a confidential bray.

Jessie stood up, and saw through the window a depressed head and shoulders over the top of the back of a garden seat. She moved towards the door. "While you have tea, mother," she said, "I must tell Mr. Hoopdriver of our arrangements."

"Don't you think I—?" began the clergyman.

"No," said Jessie, very rudely; "I don't."

"But, Jessie, haven't you already——?"

"You are already breaking the capitulation," said Jessie.

"Will you want the whole half hour?" said Widgery, at the bell.

"Every minute," said Jessie, in the doorway. "He's behaved very nobly to me."

AT THE RUFUS STONE

“There’s tea,” said Widgery.

“I’ve had tea.”

“He may not have behaved badly,” said the clergyman. “But he’s certainly an astonishingly weak person to let a wrong-headed young girl——”

Jessie closed the door into the garden.

Meanwhile Mr. Hoopdriver made a sad figure in the sunlight outside. It was over, this wonderful excursion of his, so far as she was concerned; and with the swift blow that separated them he realised all that those days had done for him. He tried to grasp the bearings of their position. Of course they would take her away to those social altitudes of hers. She would become an inaccessible young lady again. Would they let him say good-bye to her?

How extraordinary it had all been! He recalled the moment when he had first seen her riding, with the sunlight behind her, along the riverside road; he recalled that wonderful night at Bognor, remembering it as if everything had been done of his own initiative. “Brave, brave!” she had called him. And afterwards, when she came down to him in the morning, kindly, quiet. But ought he to have persuaded her then to return to her home? He remembered some intention of the sort. Now these people snatched her away from him as though he was scarcely fit to live in the same world with her. No more he was! He felt he had presumed upon her worldly ignorance in travelling with her day after day: She was so dainty, so delightful, so serene. He began to recapitulate her expressions, the light of her eyes, the turn of her face . . .

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He wasn't good enough to walk in the same road with her. Nobody was. Suppose they let him say good-bye to her; what could he say? That? But they were sure not to let her talk to him alone; her mother would be there as, what was it?—*Chaperone*. He'd never once had a chance of saying what he felt; indeed, it was only now he was beginning to realise what he felt. Love! he wouldn't presume. It was worship. If only he could have one more chance. He must have one more chance, somewhere, somehow. Then he would pour out his soul to her—eloquently. He felt eloquently, and words would come. He was dust under her feet . . .

His meditation was interrupted by the click of a doorhandle, and Jessie appeared in the sunlight under the verandah. "Come away from here," she said to Hoopdriver, as he rose to meet her. "I'm going home with them. We have to say good-bye."

Mr. Hoopdriver winced, opened and shut his mouth, and rose without a word.

XL

At first Jessie Milton and Mr. Hoopdriver walked away from the hotel in silence. He heard a catching in her breath and glanced at her and saw her lips pressed tight and a tear on her cheek. Her face was hot and bright. She was looking straight before her. He could think of nothing to say, and thrust his hands in his pockets and looked away from her intentionally. After a while she began to talk. They dealt disjointedly with scenery first, and then

AT THE RUFUS STONE

with the means of self-education. She took his address at Antrobus's and promised to send him some books. But even with that it was spiritless, aching talk, Hoopdriver felt, for the fighting mood was over. She seemed, to him, preoccupied with the memories of her late battle, and that appearance hurt him.

"It's the end," he whispered to himself. "It's the end."

They went into a hollow and up a gentle wooded slope, and came at last to a high and open space overlooking a wide expanse of country. There, by a common impulse, they stopped. She looked at her watch—a little ostentatiously. They stared at the billows of forest rolling away beneath them, crest beyond crest of leafy trees, fading at last into blue.

"The end" ran through his mind, to the exclusion of all speakable thoughts.

"And so," she said presently, breaking the silence, "it comes to good-bye."

For half a minute he did not answer. Then he gathered his resolution. "There is one thing I *must* say."

"Well?" she said, surprised and abruptly forgetting the recent argument.

"I ask no return. But——"

Then he stopped. "I won't say it. It's no good. It would be rot from me—now. I wasn't going to say anything. Good-bye."

She looked at him with a startled expression in her eyes. "No," she said. "But don't forget you are going to work. Remember, brother Chris, you

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are my friend. You will work. You are not a very strong man, you know, now—you will forgive me—nor do you know all you should. But what will you be in six years' time?"

He stared hard in front of him still, and the lines about his weak mouth seemed to strengthen. He knew she understood what he could not say.

"I'll work," he said, concisely.

They stood side by side for a moment. Then he said, with a motion of his head, "I won't come back to *them*. Do you mind? Going back alone?"

She took ten seconds to think. "No," she said, and held out her hand, biting her nether lip. "*Good-bye*," she whispered.

He turned with a white face, looked into her eyes, took her hand limply, and then with a sudden impulse lifted it to his lips. She would have snatched it away, but his grip tightened to her movement. She felt the touch of his lips, and then he had dropped her fingers and turned from her and was striding down the slope. A dozen paces away his foot turned in the lip of a rabbit hole, and he stumbled forward and almost fell. He recovered his balance and went on, not looking back. He never once looked back. She stared at his receding figure until it was small and far below her, and then, the tears running over her eyelids now, turned slowly, and walked with her hands gripped hard together behind her, towards Stoney Cross again.

"I did not know," she whispered to herself. "I did not understand. Even now— No, I do not understand."

THE ENVOY

XLI

So the story ends, dear Reader. Mr. Hoopdriver, sprawling down there among the bracken, must sprawl without our prying, I think, or listening to what chances to his breathing. And of what came of it all, of the six years and afterwards, this is no place to tell. In truth, there is no telling it, for the years have still to run. But if you see how a mere counter-jumper, a cad on casters, and a fool to boot, may come to feel the little insufficiencies of life, and if he has to any extent won your sympathies, my end is attained. (If it is not attained, may Heaven forgive us both!) Nor will we follow this adventurous young lady of ours back to her home at Surbiton, to her new struggle against Widgery and Mrs. Milton combined. For, as she will presently hear, that devoted man has got his reward. For her also, your sympathies are invited.

The rest of this great holiday, too—five days there were left of it—is beyond the limits of our design. You see fitfully a slender figure in a dusty brown suit and heather mixture stockings, and brown shoes not intended to be cycled in, flitting Londonward through Hampshire and Berkshire and Surrey, going economically—for excellent reasons. Day by day he goes on, riding as the mood takes him and for the most part through bye-roads, but getting a few miles to the north-eastward every day. He is a narrow-

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ched person, with a nose hot and tanned at the bridge with unwonted exposure, and brown, red-knuckled fists. A musing expression sits upon the face of this rider, you observe. Sometimes he whistles noiselessly to himself, sometimes he speaks aloud, "a juiced good try, anyhow!" you hear; and sometimes, and that too often for my liking, he looks irritable and hopeless. "I know," he says, "I know. It's over and done. It isn't *in* me. You ain't man enough, Hoopdriver. Look at yer silly hands! . . . Oh my God!" and a gust of passion comes upon him and he rides furiously for a space.

Sometimes again his face softens. "Anyhow, if I'm not to see her—she's going to lend me books," he thinks, and gets such comfort as he can. Then again; "Books! What's books?" Once or twice triumphant memories of the earlier incidents nerve his face for a while. "I put the ky-bosh on *his* little game," he remarks. "I *did* that," and one might even call him happy in these phases.

This figure passes through Basingstoke and Bagshot, Staines, Hampton, and Richmond. At last, in Putney High Street, glowing with the warmth of an August sunset and with all the 'prentice boys busy shutting up shop and the work girls going home and the shop folks peeping abroad, and the white 'buses full of late clerks and city folk rumbling home to their dinners, we part from him. He is back. To-morrow the early rising, the dusting and drudgery, begin again—but with a difference, with wonderful memories and still more wonderful desires and ambitions replacing those discrepant dreams.

THE ENVOY

He turns out of the High Street at the corner, dismounts with a sigh, and pushes his machine through the gates of the Antrobus stable yard, as the apprentice with the high collar holds them open. There are words of greeting. "South Coast," you hear; and "splendid weather—splendid." He sighs. "Yes—swapped him off for a couple of sovs. It's a juiced good machine."

The gate closes upon him with a slam, and he vanishes from our ken.

LOVE AND MR. LEWISHAM
THE STORY OF A VERY YOUNG COUPLE

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LOVE AND MR. LEWISHAM

“Great Spirits and Great Businesse doe keepe out this weak Passion . . . yet Love can finde Entrance not only into an open Heart but also into a Heart well fortified, if Watch be not well kept.”—*Francis Bacon.*

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCES MR. LEWISHAM

THE opening chapter does not concern itself with Love—indeed that antagonist does not certainly appear until the third—and Mr. Lewisham is seen at his studies. It was ten years ago; and in those days he was assistant master in the Whortley Proprietary School, Whortley, Sussex, and his wages were forty pounds a year, out of which he had to afford fifteen shillings a week during term time to lodge with Mrs. Munday, at the little shop in the West Street. He was called “Mr.” to distinguish him from the bigger boys, whose duty it was to learn, and it was a matter of stringent regulation that he should be addressed as “Sir.”

He wore ready-made clothes, his black jacket of rigid line was dusted about the front and sleeves with scholastic chalk, and his face was downy and his moustache incipient. He was a passable-looking youngster of eighteen, fair-haired, indifferently barbered and with a quite unnecessary pair of glasses on his fairly prominent nose—he wore these to make himself look older, that discipline might be maintained. At the particular moment when this story begins he was in his bedroom. An attic it was, with lead-framed dormer windows, a slanting ceiling and a bulging wall, covered, as a number of torn places witnessed, with innumerable strata of florid old-fashioned paper.

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To judge by the room, Mr. Lewisham thought little of Love but much on Greatness. Over the head of the bed, for example, where good folks hang texts, these truths asserted themselves, written in a clear, bold, youthfully flourishing hand:—"Knowledge is Power," and "What man has done man can do,"—man in the second instance referring to Mr. Lewisham. Never for a moment were these things to be forgotten. Mr. Lewisham could see them afresh every morning as his head came through his shirt. And over the yellow-painted box upon which—for lack of shelves—Mr. Lewisham's library was arranged, was a "*Schema*." (Why he should not have headed it "Scheme," the editor of the *Church Times*, who calls his miscellaneous notes "*Varia*," is better able to say than I.) In this scheme, 1892 was indicated as the year in which Mr. Lewisham proposed to take his B. A. degree at the London University with "hons. in all subjects," and 1895 as the date of his "gold medal." Subsequently there were to be "pamphlets in the Liberal interest," and such-like things duly dated. "Who would control others must first control himself," remarked the wall over the wash-hand stand, and behind the door against the Sunday trousers was a portrait of Carlyle.

These were no mere threats against the universe; operations had begun. Jostling Shakespeare, Emerson's *Essays*, and the penny *Life of Confucius*, there were battered and defaced school books, a number of the excellent manuals of the Universal Correspondence Association, exercise books, ink (red and black) in penny bottles, and an india-rubber stamp with Mr.

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Lewisham's name. A trophy of bluish green South Kensington certificates for geometrical drawing, astronomy, physiology, physiography, and inorganic chemistry, adorned his further wall. And against the Carlyle portrait was a manuscript list of French irregular verbs.

Attached by a drawing-pin to the roof over the wash-hand stand, which—the room being an attic—sloped almost dangerously, dangled a Time-Table. Mr. Lewisham was to rise at five, and that this was no vain boasting a cheap American alarum clock by the books on the box witnessed. The lumps of mellow chocolate on the papered ledge by the bed-head, indorsed that evidence. "French until eight," said the time-table curtly. Breakfast was to be eaten in twenty minutes; then twenty-five minutes of "literature"—to be precise, learning extracts (preferably pompous) from the plays of William Shakespeare—and then to school and duty. The time-table further prescribed Latin Composition for the recess and the dinner hour ("literature," however, during the meal), and varied its injunctions for the rest of the twenty-four hours according to the day of the week. Not a moment for Satan and that "mischief still" of his. Only three-score and ten has the confidence, as well as the time, to be idle.

But just think of the admirable quality of such a scheme! Up and busy at five, with all the world about one horizontal, warm, dreamy-brained or stupidly hullish; if roused, roused only to grunt and sigh and roll over again into oblivion. By eight three hours' clear start, three hours' knowledge

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ahead of every one. It takes, I have been told by an eminent scholar, about a thousand hours of sincere work to learn a language completely—after three or four languages much less—which gives you, even at the outset, one each a year before breakfast. The gift of tongues—picked up like mushrooms! Then that “literature”—an astonishing conception! In the afternoon mathematics and the sciences. Could anything be simpler or more magnificent? In six years Mr. Lewisham will have his five or six languages, a sound, all-round education, a habit of tremendous industry, and be still but four and twenty. He will already have honour in his university and ampler means. One realises that those pamphlets in the Liberal interest will be no obscure platitudes. Where Mr. Lewisham will be at thirty stirs the imagination. There will be modifications of the Schema, of course, as experience widens. But the spirit of it—the spirit of it is a devouring flame!

He was sitting facing the diamond-framed window, writing, writing fast, on a second yellow box that was turned on end and empty, and the lid was open, and his knees were conveniently stuck into the cavity. The bed was strewn with books and copy-graphed sheets of instructions from his remote correspondence tutors. Pursuant to the dangling time table he was, you would have noticed, translating Latin into English.

Imperceptibly the speed of his writing diminished. “*Urit me Glyceræ nitor*” lay ahead and troubled him. “Urit me,” he murmured, and his eyes travelled from his book out of window to the vicar’s

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roof opposite and its ivied chimneys. His brows were knit at first and then relaxed. "*Urit me!*" He had put his pen into his mouth and glanced about for his dictionary. *Urare?*

Suddenly his expression changed. Movement dictionary-ward ceased. He was listening to a light tapping sound—it was a footfall—outside.

He stood up abruptly, and stretching his neck peered through his unnecessary glasses and the diamond panes down into the street. Looking acutely downward he could see a hat daintily trimmed with pinkish white blossom, the shoulder of a jacket, and just the tips of nose and chin. Certainly the stranger who sat under the gallery last Sunday next the Frobishers. Then, too, he had seen her only obliquely. . . .

He watched her until she passed beyond the window frame. He strained to see impossibly round the corner. . . .

Then he started, frowned, took his pen from his mouth. "This wandering attention!" he said. "The slightest thing! Where was I? Tcha!" He made a noise with his teeth to express his irritation, sat down, and replaced his knees in the upturned box. "Urit me," he said, biting the end of his pen and looking for his dictionary.

It was a Wednesday half-holiday late in March, a spring day glorious in amber light, dazzling white clouds and the intensest blue, casting a powder of wonderful green hither and thither among the trees and rousing all the birds to tumultuous rejoicings; a rousing day, a clamatory insistent day, a veritable

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herald of summer. The stir of that anticipation was in the air, the warm earth was parting above the swelling seeds, and all the pine woods were full of the minute crepitation of opening bud scales. And not only was the stir of Mother Nature's awakening in the earth and the air and the trees, but also in Mr. Lewisham's youthful blood, bidding him rouse himself to live—live in a sense quite other than that the Schema indicated.

He saw the dictionary peeping from under a paper, looked up "Urit me," appreciated the shining "nitor" of Glycera's shoulders, and so fell idle again to rouse himself abruptly.

"I *can't* fix my attention," said Mr. Lewisham. He took off the needless glasses, wiped them, and blinked his eyes. This confounded Horace and his stimulating epithets! A walk?

"I won't be beat," he said—incorrectly—replaced his glasses, brought his elbows down on either side of his box with resonant violence, and clutched the hair over his ears with both hands. . . .

In five minutes' time he found himself watching the swallows curving through the blue over the vicarage garden.

"Did ever man have such a bother with himself as me?" he asked vaguely but vehemently. "It's self-indulgence does it—sitting down's the beginning of laziness."

So he stood up to his work, and came into permanent view of the village street. "If she has gone round the corner by the post-office, she will come in sight over the palings above the allotments,"

INTRODUCES MR. LEWISHAM

suggested the unexplored and undisciplined region of Mr. Lewisham's mind. . . .

She did not come into sight. Apparently she had not gone round by the post-office after all. It made one wonder where she had gone. Did she go up through the town to the avenue on these occasions? . . . Then abruptly a cloud drove across the sunlight, the glowing street went cold and Mr. Lewisham's imagination submitted to control. So "*Mater saeva cupidinum*," "The untameable mother of desires,"—Horace (Book II. of the Odes) was the author appointed by the university for Mr. Lewisham's matriculation—was, after all, translated to its prophetic end.

Precisely as the church clock struck five Mr. Lewisham, with a punctuality that was indeed almost too prompt for a really earnest student, shut his Horace, took up his Shakespeare, and descended the narrow, curved, uncarpeted staircase that led from his garret to the living-room in which he had his tea with his landlady, Mrs. Munday. That good lady was alone, and after a few civilities Mr. Lewisham opened his Shakespeare and read from a mark onward—that mark, by-the-bye, was in the middle of a scene—while he consumed mechanically a number of slices of bread and whort jam.

Mrs. Munday watched him over her spectacles and thought how bad so much reading must be for the eyes, until the tinkling of her shop-bell called her away to a customer. At twenty-five minutes to six he put the book back on the window-sill, dashed a few crumbs from his jacket, assumed a mortar-

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board cap that was lying on the tea-caddy, and went forth to his evening "preparation duty."

The West Street was empty and shining golden with the sunset. Its beauty seized upon him, and he forgot to repeat the passage from Henry VIII. that should have occupied him down the street. Instead he was presently thinking of that insubordinate glance from his window and of little chins and nose-tips. His eyes became remote in their expression. . . .

The school door was opened by an obsequious little boy with "lines" to be examined.

Mr. Lewisham felt a curious change of atmosphere on his entry. The door slammed behind him. The hall with its insistent scholastic suggestions, its yellow marbled paper, its long rows of hat-pegs, its disreputable array of umbrellas, a broken mortar-board and a tattered and scattered *Principia*, seemed dim and dull in contrast with the luminous stir of the early March evening outside. An unusual sense of the greyness of a teacher's life, of the greyness indeed of the life of all studious souls, came and went in his mind. He took the "lines," written painfully over three pages of exercise book, and obliterated them with a huge G. E. L., scrawled monstrously across each page. He heard the familiar mingled noises of the playground drifting in to him through the open schoolroom door.

CHAPTER II

“ AS THE WIND BLOWS ”

A FLAW in that pentagram of a time table, that pentagram by which the demons of distraction were to be excluded from Mr. Lewisham's career to Greatness, was the absence of a clause forbidding study out of doors. It was the day after the trivial window peeping of the last chapter that this gap in the time table became apparent, a day if possible more gracious and alluring than its predecessor, and at half-past twelve, instead of returning from the school directly to his lodging, Mr. Lewisham escaped through the omission and made his way—Horace in pocket—to the park gates and so to the avenue of ancient trees that encircles the broad Whortley domain. He dismissed a suspicion of his motive with perfect success. In the avenue—for the path is but little frequented—one might expect to read undisturbed. The open air, the erect attitude, are surely better than sitting in a stuffy, enervating bedroom. The open air is distinctly healthy, hardy, simple. . . .

The day was breezy, and there was a perpetual rustling, a going and coming in the budding trees.

The network of the beeches was full of golden sunlight, and all the lower branches were shot with horizontal dashes of new-born green.

*“ Tu, nisi ventis
Debes ludibrium, cave.”*

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was the appropriate matter of Mr. Lewisham's thoughts, and he was mechanically trying to keep the book open in three places at once, at the text, the notes and the literal translation, while he turned up the vocabulary for *ludibrium*, when his attention, wandering dangerously near the top of the page, fell over the edge and escaped with incredible swiftness down the avenue. . . .

A girl wearing a straw hat adorned with white blossom, was advancing towards him. Her occupation, too, was literary. Indeed, she was so busy writing that evidently she did not perceive him.

Unreasonable emotions descended upon Mr. Lewisham—emotions that are unaccountable on the mere hypothesis of a casual meeting. Something was whispered; it sounded suspiciously like "It's her!" He advanced with his fingers in his book, ready to retreat to its pages if she looked up, and watched her over it. *Ludibrium* passed out of his universe. She was clearly unaware of his nearness, he thought, intent upon her writing, whatever that might be. He wondered what it might be. Her face, foreshortened by her downward regard, seemed infantile. Her fluttering skirt was short, and showed her shoes and ankles. He noted her graceful, easy steps. A figure of health and lightness it was, sunlit, and advancing towards him, something, as he afterwards recalled with a certain astonishment, quite outside the Schema.

Nearer she came and nearer, her eyes still downcast. He was full of vague, stupid promptings towards an uncalled-for intercourse. It was curious

“AS THE WIND BLOWS”

she did not see him. He began to expect almost painfully the moment when she would look up, though what there was to expect—! He thought of what she would see when she discovered him, and wondered where the tassel of his cap might be hanging—it sometimes occluded one eye. It was of course quite impossible to put up a hand and investigate. He was near trembling with excitement. His paces, acts which are usually automatic, became uncertain and difficult. One might have thought he had never passed a human being before. Still nearer, ten yards now, nine, eight. Would she go past without looking up? . . .

Then their eyes met.

She had hazel eyes, but Mr. Lewisham being quite an amateur about eyes, could find no words for them. She looked demurely into his face. She seemed to find nothing there. She glanced away from him among the trees, and passed, and nothing remained in front of him but an empty avenue, a sunlit, green-shot void.

The incident was over.

From far away the soughing of the breeze swept towards him, and in a moment all the twigs about him were quivering and rustling and the boughs creaking with a gust of wind. It seemed to urge him away from her. The faded dead leaves that had once been green and young sprang up, raced one another, leaped, danced and pirouetted, and then something large struck him on the neck, stayed for a startling moment, and drove past him up the avenue.

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Something vividly white! A sheet of paper—the sheet upon which she had been writing!

For what seemed a long time he did not grasp the situation. He glanced over his shoulder and understood suddenly. His awkwardness vanished. Horace in hand, he gave chase, and in ten paces had secured the fugitive document. He turned towards her, flushed with triumph, the quarry in his hand. He had as he picked it up seen what was written, but the situation dominated him for the instant. He made a stride towards her, and only then understood what he had seen. Lines of a measured length and capitals! Could it really be—? He stopped. He looked again, eyebrows rising. He held it before him, staring now quite frankly. It had been written with a stylographic pen. Thus it ran:

“Come! Sharp’s the word.”

And then again,

“Come! Sharp’s the word.”

And then,

“Come! Sharp’s the word.”

“Come! Sharp’s the word.”

And so on all down the page, in a boyish hand uncommonly like Frobisher ii.’s.

Surely! “I say!” said Mr. Lewisham, struggling with the new aspect and forgetting all his manners in his surprise. . . . He remembered giving the imposition quite well:—Frobisher ii. had repeated the exhortation just a little too loudly—had brought the thing upon himself. To find her doing this jarred oddly upon certain vague preconceptions he had formed of her. Somehow it seemed as if she had betrayed him. That of course was only for the instant.

“AS THE WIND BLOWS”

She had come up with him now. “May I have my sheet of paper, please?” she said with a catching of her breath. She was a couple of inches less in height than he. Do you observe her half-open lips, said Mother Nature in a noiseless aside to Mr. Lewisham—a thing he afterwards recalled. In her eyes was a touch of apprehension.

“I say,” he said, with protest still uppermost. “You oughtn’t to do this.”

“Do what?”

“This. Impositions. For my boys.”

She raised her eyebrows, then knitted them momentarily, and looked at him. “Are *you* Mr. Lewisham?” she asked with an affectation of entire ignorance and discovery.

She knew him perfectly well, which was one reason why she was writing the imposition, but pretending not to know gave her something to say.

Mr. Lewisham nodded.

“Of all people! Then”—frankly—“you have just found me out.”

“I am afraid I have,” said Lewisham. “I am afraid I *have* found you out.”

They looked at one another for the next move. She decided to plead in extenuation.

“Teddy Frobisher is my cousin. I know it’s very wrong, but he seemed to have such a lot to do and to be in *such* trouble. And I had nothing to do. In fact, it was *I* who offered. . . .”

She stopped and looked at him. She seemed to consider her remark complete.

That meeting of the eyes had an oddly disconcerting quality. He tried to keep to the business

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of the imposition. "You ought not to have done that," he said, encountering her steadfastly.

She looked down and then into his face again. "No," she said, "I suppose I ought not to. I'm very sorry."

Her looking down and up again produced another unreasonable effect. It seemed to Lewisham that they were discussing something quite other than the topic of their conversation; a persuasion patently absurd and only to be accounted for by the general disorder of his faculties. He made a serious attempt to keep his footing of reproof.

"I should have detected the writing, you know."

"Of course you would. It was very wrong of me to persuade him. But I did—I assure you. He seemed in such trouble. And I thought——"

She made another break, and there was a faint deepening of colour in her cheeks. Suddenly, stupidly, his own adolescent cheeks began to glow. It became necessary to banish that sense of a duplicate topic forthwith.

"I can assure you," he said, now very earnestly, "I never give a punishment, never, unless it is merited. I make that a rule. I—er—*always* make that a rule. I am very careful indeed."

"I am really sorry," she interrupted with frank contrition. "It *was* silly of me."

Lewisham felt unaccountably sorry she should have to apologise, and he spoke at once with the idea of checking the reddening of his face. "I don't think *that*," he said with a sort of belated alacrity. "Really, it was kind of you, you know—"

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very kind of you indeed. And I know that—I can quite understand that—er—your kindness . . .”

“Ran away with me. And now poor little Teddy will get into worse trouble for letting me . . .”

“Oh no,” said Mr. Lewisham, perceiving an opportunity and trying not to smile his appreciation of what he was saying. “I had no business to read this as I picked it up—absolutely no business. Consequently . . .”

“You won’t take any notice of it? Really!”

“Certainly not,” said Mr. Lewisham.

Her face lit with a smile, and Mr. Lewisham’s relaxed in sympathy. “It is nothing—it’s the proper thing for me to do, you know.”

“But so many people wouldn’t do it. Schoolmasters are not usually so—chivalrous.”

He was chivalrous! The phrase acted like a spur. He obeyed a foolish impulse.

“If you like—” he said.

“What?”

“He needn’t do this. The Impot., I mean. I’ll let him off.”

“Really?”

“I can.”

“It’s awfully kind of you.”

“I don’t mind,” he said. “It’s nothing much. If you really think . . .”

He was full of self-applause for this scandalous sacrifice of justice.

“It’s awfully kind of you,” she said.

“It’s nothing, really,” he explained, “nothing.”

“Most people wouldn’t——”

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"I know."

Pause.

"It's all right," he said. "Really."

He would have given worlds for something more to say, something witty and original, but nothing came.

The pause lengthened. She glanced over her shoulder down the vacant avenue. This interview—this momentous series of things unsaid was coming to an end! She looked at him hesitatingly and smiled again. She held out her hand. No doubt that was the proper thing to do. He took it, searching a void, tumultuous mind in vain.

"It's awfully kind of you," she said again as she did so.

"It don't matter a bit," said Mr. Lewisham, and sought vainly for some other saying, some doorway remark into new topics. Her hand was cool and soft and firm, the most delightful thing to grasp, and this observation ousted all other things. He held it for a moment, but nothing would come.

They discovered themselves hand in hand. They both laughed and felt "silly." They shook hands in the manner of quite intimate friends, and snatched their hands away awkwardly. She turned, glanced timidly at him over her shoulder, and hesitated. "Good-bye," she said, and was suddenly walking from him.

He bowed to her receding back, made a seventeenth-century sweep with his college cap, and then some hitherto unexplored regions of his mind flashed into revolt.

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Hardly had she gone six paces when he was at her side again.

“I say,” he said with a fearful sense of his temerity and raising his mortar-board awkwardly as though he was passing a funeral. “But that sheet of paper . . .”

“Yes,” she said, surprised—quite naturally.

“May I have it?”

“Why?”

He felt a breathless pleasure, like that of sliding down a slope of snow. “I would like to have it.”

She smiled and raised her eyebrows, but his excitement was now too great for smiling. “Look here!” she said, and displayed the sheet crumpled into a ball. She laughed—with a touch of effort.

“I don’t mind that,” said Mr. Lewisham laughing too. He captured the paper by an insistent gesture and smoothed it out with fingers that trembled.

“You don’t mind?” he said.

“Mind what?”

“If I keep it?”

“Why should I?”

Pause. Their eyes met again. There was an odd constraint about both of them, a palpitating interval of silence.

“I really *must* be going,” she said suddenly, breaking the spell by an effort. She turned about and left him with the crumpled piece of paper in the fist that held the book, the other hand once more lifting the mortar-board in a dignified salute.

He watched her receding figure. His heart was beating with remarkable rapidity. How light, how

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living she seemed! Little round flakes of sunlight raced down her as she went. She walked fast, then slowly, looking sideways once or twice but not back, until she reached the park gates. Then she looked towards him, a remote, friendly little figure, made a gesture of farewell, and disappeared.

His face was flushed and his eyes bright. Curiously enough, he was out of breath. He stared for a long time at the vacant end of the avenue. Then he turned his eyes to his trophy gripped against the closed and forgotten Horace in his hand.

CHAPTER III

THE WONDERFUL DISCOVERY

ON Sunday it was Lewisham's duty to accompany the boarders twice to church. The boys sat in the gallery above the choir, facing the organ loft and at right angles to the general congregation. It was a prominent position, and made him feel painfully conspicuous, except in moods of exceptional vanity when he used to imagine that all these people were thinking how his forehead and his certificates accorded. He thought a lot in those days of his certificates and forehead, but little of his honest, healthy face beneath it. (To tell the truth there was nothing very wonderful about his forehead.) He rarely looked down the church, as he fancied to do so would be to meet the collective eye of the congregation regarding him. So that in the morning he was not able to see that the Frobishers' pew was empty until the litany.

But in the evening, on the way to church, the Frobishers and their guest crossed the market-square as his string of boys marched along the west side. And the guest was arrayed in a gay new dress, as if it were already Easter, and her face set in its dark hair came with a strange effect of mingled freshness and familiarity. She looked at him calmly! He felt very awkward and was for cutting his new acquaintance. Then hesitated, and raised his hat

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with a jerk as if to Mrs. Frobisher. Neither lady acknowledged his salute, which may possibly have been a little unexpected. Then young Siddons dropped his hymn-book, stooped to pick it up, and Lewisham almost fell over him. . . . He entered church in a mood of black despair.

But consolation of a sort came soon enough. As *she* took her seat she distinctly glanced up at the gallery, and afterwards as he knelt to pray, he peeped between his fingers and saw her looking up again. She was certainly not laughing at him.

In those days much of Lewisham's mind was still an unknown land to him. He believed among other things that he was always the same consistent intelligent human being, whereas under certain stimuli he became no longer reasonable and disciplined but a purely imaginative and emotional person. Music, for instance, carried him away, and particularly the effect of many voices in unison whirled him off from almost any state of mind to a fine massive emotionality. And the evening service at Whortley church—at the evening service surplices were worn—the chanting and singing, the vague brilliance of the numerous candle flames, the multitudinous unanimity of the congregation down there, kneeling, rising, thunderously responding, invariably inebriated him. Inspired him, if you will, and turned the prose of his life into poetry. And Chance, coming to the aid of Dame Nature, dropped just the apt suggestion into his now highly responsive ear.

The second hymn was a simple and popular one, dealing with the theme of Faith, Hope and Charity,

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and having each verse ending with the word "Love."
Conceive it, long drawn out and disarticulate,—

Faith will van . . . ish in . . . to sight,
Hope be emp . . . tied in deli . . . ight,
Love in Heaven will shine more bri . . . ight
There . . . fore give us Love.

At the third repetition of the refrain, Lewisham looked down across the chancel and met her eyes for a brief instant. . . .

He stopped singing abruptly. Then the consciousness of the serried ranks of faces below there, came with almost overwhelming force upon him, and he dared not look at her again. He felt the blood rushing to his face.

Love! The greatest of these. The greatest of all things. Better than fame. Better than knowledge. So came the great discovery like a flood across his mind, pouring over it with the cadence of the hymn and sending a tide of pink in sympathy across his forehead. The rest of the service was phantasmagorical background to that great reality—a phantasmagorical background a little inclined to stare. He, Mr. Lewisham, was in Love.

"A . . . men." He was so preoccupied that he found the whole congregation subsiding into their seats, and himself still standing, rapt. He sat down spasmodically, with an impact that seemed to him to re-echo through the church.

As they came out of the porch into the thickening night he seemed to see her everywhere. He fancied she had gone on in front, and he hurried up the boys in the hope of overtaking her. They pushed

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through the throng of dim people going homeward. Should he raise his hat to her again? . . . But it was Susie Hopbrow in a light-coloured dress—a raven in dove's plumage. He felt a curious mixture of relief and disappointment. He would see her no more that night.

He hurried from the school to his lodging. He wanted very urgently to be alone. He went upstairs to his little room and sat before the upturned box on which his Butler's "Analogy" was spread open. He did not go to the formality of lighting the candle. He leaned back and gazed blissfully at the solitary planet that hung over the vicarage garden.

He took out of his pocket a crumpled sheet of paper, smoothed and carefully refolded, covered with a writing not unlike that of Frobisher ii., and after some maidenly hesitation pressed this treasure to his lips. The Schema and the time-table hung in the darkness like the mere ghosts of themselves.

Mrs. Munday called him thrice to his supper.

He went out immediately after it was eaten and wandered under the stars until he came over the hill behind the town again, and clambered up the back to the stile in sight of the Frobishers' house. He selected the only lit window as hers. Behind the blind, Mrs. Frobisher, thirty-eight, was busy with her curl-papers—she used papers because they were better for the hair—and discussing certain neighbours in a fragmentary way with Mr. Frobisher, who was in bed. Presently she moved the candle to examine a faint discoloration of her complexion that rendered her uneasy.

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Outside, Mr. Lewisham (eighteen) stood watching the orange oblong for the best part of half an hour, until it vanished and left the house black and blank. Then he sighed deeply and returned home in a very glorious mood indeed.

He awoke the next morning feeling extremely serious, but not clearly remembering the overnight occurrences. His eye fell on his clock. The time was six and he had not heard the alarum; as a matter of fact the alarum had not been wound up. He jumped out of bed at once and alighted upon his best trousers amorphously dropped on the floor instead of methodically cast over a chair. As he soaped his head he tried, according to his rules of revision, to remember the overnight reading. He could not for the life of him. The truth came to him as he was getting into his shirt. His head, struggling in its recesses, became motionless, the handless cuffs ceased to dangle for a minute. . . .

Then his head came through slowly with a surprised expression upon his face. He remembered. He remembered the thing as a bald discovery, and without a touch of emotion. With all the achromatic clearness, the unromantic colourlessness of the early morning. . . .

Yes. He had it now quite distinctly. There had been no overnight reading. He was in Love.

The proposition jarred with some vague thing in his mind. He stood staring for a space, and then began looking about absent-mindedly for his collar-stud. He paused in front of his Schema, regarding it.

CHAPTER IV

RAISED EYEBROWS

“WORK must be done anyhow,” said Mr. Lewisham.

But never had the extraordinary advantages of open-air study presented themselves so vividly. Before breakfast he took half an hour of open-air reading along the allotments land near the Frobishers' house; after breakfast and before school he went through the avenue with a book, and returned from school to his lodgings circuitously through the avenue, and so back to the avenue for thirty minutes or so before afternoon school. When during these periods of open-air study Mr. Lewisham was not looking over the top of his book, then commonly he was glancing over his shoulder. And at last whom should he see but——!

He saw her out of the corner of his eye, and he turned away at once, pretending not to have seen her. His whole being was suddenly irradiated with emotion. The hands holding his book gripped it very tightly. He did not glance back again, but walked slowly and steadfastly, reading an ode that he could not have translated to save his life, and listening acutely for her approach. And after an interminable time, as it seemed, came a faint footfall and the swish of skirts behind him.

He felt as though his head was directed forward by a clutch of iron.

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“Mr. Lewisham,” she said close to him, and he turned with a quality of movement that was almost convulsive. He raised his cap clumsily.

He took her extended hand by an afterthought, and held it until she withdrew it. “I am so glad to have met you,” she said.

“So am I,” said Lewisham simply.

They stood facing one another for an expressive moment, and then by a movement she indicated her intention to walk along the avenue with him. “I wanted so much,” she said, looking down at her feet, “to thank you for letting Teddy off, you know. That is why I wanted to see you.” Lewisham took his first step beside her. “And it’s odd, isn’t it,” she said looking up into his face, “that I should meet you here in just the same place. I believe . . . Yes. The very same place we met before.”

Mr. Lewisham was tongue-tied.

“Do you often come here?” she said.

“Well,” he considered—and his voice was most unreasonably hoarse when he spoke— “No. No. . . . That is— At least not often. Now and then. In fact I like it rather for reading and that sort of thing. It’s so quiet.”

“I suppose you read a great deal?”

“When one teaches one has to.”

“But you . . .”

“I’m rather fond of reading, certainly. Are you?”

“I *love* it.”

Mr. Lewisham was glad she loved reading. He would have been disappointed had she answered differently. But she spoke with real fervour. She

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loved reading! It was pleasant. She would understand him a little perhaps. "Of course," she went on, "I'm not clever like some people are. And I have to read books as I get hold of them."

"So do I," said Mr. Lewisham, "for the matter of that. . . . Have you read . . . Carlyle?"

The conversation was now fairly under way. They were walking side by side beneath the swaying boughs. Mr. Lewisham's sensations were ecstatic, marred only by a dread of some casual boy coming upon them. She had not read *much* Carlyle. She had always wanted to, even from quite a little girl—she had heard so much about him. She knew he was a Really Great Writer, a *very* Great Writer indeed. All she *had* read of him she liked. She could say that. As much as she liked anything. And she had seen his house in Chelsea.

Lewisham, whose knowledge of London had been obtained by excursion trips on six or seven isolated days, was much impressed by this. It seemed to put her at once on a footing of intimacy with this imposing Personality. It had never occurred to him at all vividly that these Great Writers had real abiding places. She gave him a few descriptive touches that made the house suddenly real and distinctive to him. She lived quite near, she said, at least within walking distance, in Clapham. He instantly forgot the vague design of lending her his "*Sartor Resartus*" in his curiosity to learn more about her home. "Clapham—that's almost in London, isn't it?" he said.

"Quite," she said, but she volunteered no further

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information about her domestic circumstances. "I like London," she generalised, "and especially in winter." And she proceeded to praise London, its public libraries, its shops, the multitudes of people, the facilities for "doing what you like," the concerts one could go to, the theatres. (It seemed she moved in fairly good society.) "There's always something to see even if you only go out for a walk," she said, "and down here there's nothing to read but idle novels. And those not new."

Mr. Lewisham had regretfully to admit the lack of such culture and mental activity in Whortley. It made him feel terribly her inferior. He had only his bookishness and his certificates to set against it all—and she had seen Carlyle's house! "Down here," she said, "there's nothing to talk about but scandal." It was too true.

At the corner by the stile, beyond which the willows were splendid against the blue with silvery aments and golden pollen, they turned by mutual impulse and retraced their steps. "I've simply had no one to talk to down here," she said. "Not what *I* call talking."

"I hope," said Lewisham, making a resolute plunge, "perhaps while you are staying at Whortley . . ."

He paused perceptibly, and she, following his eyes, saw a voluminous black figure approaching. "We may," said Mr. Lewisham, resuming his remark, "chance to meet again, perhaps."

He had been about to challenge her to a deliberate meeting. A certain delightful tangle of paths

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that followed the bank of the river had been in his mind. But the apparition of Mr. George Bonover, headmaster of the Whortley Proprietary School, chilled him amazingly. Dame Nature no doubt had arranged the meeting of our young couple, but about Bonover she seems to have been culpably careless. She now receded illimitably, and Mr. Lewisham, with the most unpleasant feelings, found himself face to face with a typical representative of a social organisation which objects very strongly *inter alia* to promiscuous conversation on the part of the young unmarried junior master.

“—chance to meet again, perhaps,” said Mr. Lewisham, with a sudden lack of spirit.

“I hope so too,” she said.

Pause. Mr. Bonover's features, and particularly a bushy pair of black eyebrows, were now very near, those eyebrows already raised, apparently to express a refined astonishment.

“Is this Mr. Bonover coming?” she asked.

“Yes.”

Prolonged pause.

Would he stop and accost them? At any rate this frightful silence must end. Mr. Lewisham sought in his mind for some remark wherewith to cover his employer's approach. He was surprised to find his mind a desert. He made a colossal effort. If they could only talk, if they could only seem at their ease! But this blank incapacity was eloquent of guilt. Ah!

“It's a lovely day, though,” said Mr. Lewisham. “Isn't it?”

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She agreed with him. "Isn't it?" she said.

And then Mr. Bonover passed, forehead tight reefed so to speak, and lips impressively compressed. Mr. Lewisham raised his mortar-board, and to his astonishment Mr. Bonover responded with a markedly formal salute—mock clerical hat sweeping circuitously—and the regard of a searching, disapproving eye, and so passed. Lewisham was overcome with astonishment at this improvement on the nod of their ordinary commerce. And so this terrible incident terminated for the time.

He felt a momentary gust of indignation. After all, why should Bonover or any one interfere with his talking to a girl if he chose? And for all he knew they might have been properly introduced. By young Frobisher, say. Nevertheless, Lewisham's spring-tide mood relapsed into winter. He was, he felt, singularly stupid for the rest of their conversation, and the delightful feeling of enterprise that had hitherto inspired and astonished him when talking to her had shrivelled beyond contempt. He was glad—positively glad—when things came to an end.

At the park gates she held out her hand. "I'm afraid I have interrupted your reading," she said.

"Not a bit," said Mr. Lewisham warming slightly. "I don't know when I've enjoyed a conversation . . ."

"It was—a breach of etiquette, I am afraid, my speaking to you, but I did so want to thank you. . . ."

"Don't mention it," said Mr. Lewisham, secretly impressed by the etiquette.

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“Good-bye.” He stood hesitating by the lodge, and then turned back up the avenue in order not to be seen to follow her too closely up the West Street.

And then, still walking away from her, he remembered that he had not lent her a book as he had planned, nor made any arrangement ever to meet her again. She might leave Whortley anywhen for the amenities of Clapham. He stopped and stood irresolute. Should he run after her? Then he recalled Bonover’s enigmatical expression of face. He decided that to pursue her would be altogether too conspicuous. Yet . . . So he stood in inglorious hesitation, while the seconds passed.

He reached his lodging at last to find Mrs. Munday half-way through dinner.

“You get them books of yours,” said Mrs. Munday, who took a motherly interest in him, “and you read and you read, and you take no account of time. And now you’ll have to eat your dinner half cold and no time for it to settle proper before you goes off to school. It’s ruination to a stummik—such ways.”

“Oh, never mind my stomach, Mrs. Munday,” said Lewisham, roused from a tangled and apparently gloomy meditation; “that’s *my* affair.” Quite crossly he spoke for him.

“I’d rather have a good sensible actin’ stummik than a full head,” said Mrs. Munday, “any day.”

“I’m different, you see,” snapped Mr. Lewisham, and relapsed into silence and gloom.

(“Hoity toity!” said Mrs. Munday under her breath.)

CHAPTER V

HESITATIONS

MR. BONOVER, having fully matured a Hint suitable for the occasion, dropped it in the afternoon while Lewisham was superintending cricket practice. He made a few remarks about the prospects of the first eleven by way of introduction, and Lewisham agreed with him that Frobisher i. looked like shaping very well this season.

A pause followed and the headmaster hummed. "By-the-bye," he said, as if making conversation and still watching the play; "I, ah—understood that you, ah—were a *stranger* to Whortley."

"Yes," said Lewisham, "that's so."

"You have made friends in the neighbourhood?"

Lewisham was troubled with a cough and his ears—those confounded ears—brightened. "Yes," he said, recovering. "Oh yes. Yes. I have."

"Local people, I presume."

"Well, no. Not exactly." The brightness spread from Lewisham's ears over his face.

"I saw you," said Bonover, "talking to a young lady in the avenue. Her face was somehow quite familiar to me. Who *was* she?"

Should he say she was a friend of the Frobishers? In that case Bonover, in his insidious amiable way, might talk to the Frobisher parents and make things disagreeable for her. "She was," said Lewisham,

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flushing deeply with the stress on his honesty and dropping his voice to a mumble, "a . . . a . . . an old friend of my mother's. In fact, I met her once at Salisbury."

"Where?"

"Salisbury."

"And her name?"

"Smith," said Lewisham, a little hastily and repenting the lie even as it left his lips.

"Well *hit*, Harris!" shouted Bonover, and began to clap his hands. "Well *hit*, sir."

"Harris shapes very well," said Mr. Lewisham.

"Very," said Mr. Bonover. "And—what was it? Ah! I was just remarking the odd resemblances there are in the world. There is a Miss Henderson—or Henson—stopping with the Frobishers—in the very same town, in fact, the very picture of your Miss . . ."

"Smith," said Lewisham, meeting his eye and recovering the full crimson note of his first blush.

"It's odd," said Bonover, regarding him pensively.

"Very odd," mumbled Lewisham, cursing his own stupidity and looking away.

"*Very—very odd*," said Bonover.

"In fact," said Bonover, turning towards the schoolhouse, "I hardly expected it of you, Mr. Lewisham."

"Expected what, sir?"

But Mr. Bonover feigned to be already out of earshot.

"Damn!" said Mr. Lewisham. "Oh!—*damn!*"—a most objectionable expression and rare with him in those days. He had half a mind to follow

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the headmaster and ask him if he doubted his word. It was only too evident what the answer would be.

He stood for a minute undecided, then turned on his heel and marched homeward with savage steps. His muscles quivered as he walked, and his face twitched. The tumult of his mind settled at last into angry indignation.

“Confound him!” said Mr. Lewisham, arguing the matter out with the bedroom furniture. “Why the *devil* can’t he mind his own business?”

“Mind your own business, sir!” shouted Mr. Lewisham at the wash-hand stand. “Confound you, sir, mind your own business!”

The wash-hand stand did.

“You overrate your power, sir,” said Mr. Lewisham a little mollified. “Understand me! I am my own master out of school.”

Nevertheless, for four days and some hours after Mr. Bonover’s Hint, Mr. Lewisham so far observed its implications as to abandon open-air study and struggle with diminishing success to observe the spirit as well as the letter of his time-table prescriptions. For the most part he fretted at accumulating tasks, did them with slipshod energy or looked out of window. The Career constituent insisted that to meet and talk to this girl again meant reproof, worry, interference with his work for his matriculation, the destruction of all “Discipline,” and he saw the entire justice of the insistence. It was nonsense this being in love; there wasn’t such a thing as love outside trashy novelettes. And forthwith his mind went off at a tangent to her eyes

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under the shadow of her hat brim, and had to be lugged back by main force. On Thursday when he was returning from school he saw her far away down the street, and hurried in to avoid her, looking ostentatiously in the opposite direction. But that was a turning-point. Shame overtook him. On Friday his belief in love was warm and living again, and his heart full of remorse for laggard days.

On Saturday morning his preoccupation with her was so vivid that it distracted him even while he was teaching that most teachable subject, algebra; and by the end of the school hours the issue was decided and the Career in headlong rout. That afternoon he would go, whatever happened, and see her and speak to her again. The thought of Bonover arose only to be dismissed. And besides——

Bonover took a siesta early in the afternoon.

Yes, he would go out and find her and speak to her. Nothing should stop him.

Once that decision was taken his imagination became riotous with things he might say, attitudes he might strike, and a multitude of vague fine dreams about her. He would say this, he would say that, his mind would do nothing but circle round this wonderful pose of lover. What a cur he had been to hide from her so long! What could he have been thinking about? How *could* he explain it to her, when the meeting really came? Suppose he was very frank——

He considered the limits of frankness. Would she believe he had not seen her on Thursday?—if he assured her that it was so?

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And, most horrible, in the midst of all this came Bonover with a request that he would take "duty" in the cricket field instead of Dunkerley that afternoon. Dunkerley was the senior assistant master, Lewisham's sole colleague. The last vestige of disapprobation had vanished from Bonover's manner; asking a favour was his autocratic way of proffering the olive branch. But it came to Lewisham as a cruel imposition. For a fateful moment he trembled on the brink of acquiescence. In a flash came a vision of the long duty of the afternoon—she possibly packing for Clapham all the while. He turned white. Mr. Bonover watched his face.

"No," said Lewisham bluntly, saying all he was sure of, and forthwith racking his unpractised mind for an excuse. "I'm sorry I can't oblige you, but . . . my arrangements . . . I've made arrangements, in fact, for the afternoon."

Mr. Bonover's eyebrows went up at this obvious lie, and the glow of his suavity faded. "You see," he said, "Mrs. Bonover expects a friend this afternoon, and we rather want Mr. Dunkerley to make four at croquet. . . ."

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Lewisham, still resolute, and making a mental note that Bonover would be playing croquet.

"You don't play croquet by any chance?" asked Bonover.

"No," said Lewisham, "I haven't an idea."

"If Mr. Dunkerley had asked you? . . ." persisted Bonover, knowing Lewisham's respect for etiquette.

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“Oh! it wasn't on that account,” said Lewisham, and Bonover with eyebrows still raised and a general air of outraged astonishment left him standing there, white and stiff, and wondering at his extraordinary temerity.

CHAPTER VI

THE SCANDALOUS RAMBLE

As soon as school was dismissed Lewisham made a gaol-delivery of his outstanding impositions, and hurried back to his lodgings, to spend the time until his dinner was ready— Well? . . . It seems hardly fair, perhaps, to Lewisham to tell this; it is doubtful, indeed, whether a male novelist's duty to his sex should not restrain him, but, as the wall in the shadow by the diamond-framed window insisted, "*Magna est veritas et prevalebit.*" Mr. Lewisham brushed his hair with elaboration, and ruffled it picturesquely, tried the effect of all his ties and selected a white one, dusted his boots with an old pocket-handkerchief, changed his trousers because the week-day pair was minutely frayed at the heels, and inked the elbows of his coat where the stitches were a little white. And, to be still more intimate, he studied his callow appearance in the glass from various points of view, and decided that his nose might have been a little smaller with advantage. . . .

Directly after dinner he went out, and by the shortest path to the allotments lane, telling himself he did not care if he met Bonover forthwith in the street. He did not know precisely what he intended to do, but he was quite clear that he meant to see the girl he had met in the avenue. He knew he should see her. A sense of obstacles merely braced

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him and was pleasurable. He went up the stone steps out of the lane to the stile that overlooked the Frobishers, the stile from which he had watched the Frobisher bedroom. There he seated himself with his arms folded, in full view of the house.

That was at ten minutes to two. At twenty minutes to three he was still sitting there, but his hands were deep in his jacket pockets, and he was scowling and kicking his foot against the step with an impatient monotony. His needless glasses had been thrust into his waistcoat pocket—where they remained throughout the afternoon—and his cap was tilted a little back from his forehead and exposed a wisp of hair. One or two people had gone down the lane, and he had pretended not to see them, and a couple of hedge-sparrows chasing each other along the side of the sunlit, wind-rippled field had been his chief entertainment. It is unaccountable, no doubt, but he felt angry with her as the time crept on. His expression lowered.

He heard some one going by in the lane behind him. He would not look round—it annoyed him to think of people seeing him in this position. His once eminent discretion, though overthrown, still made muffled protests at the afternoon's enterprise. The feet down the lane stopped close at hand.

“Stare away,” said Lewisham between his teeth. And then began mysterious noises, a violent rustle of hedge twigs, a something like a very light foot-tapping.

Curiosity boarded Lewisham and carried him after the briefest struggle. He looked round, and

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there she was, her back to him, reaching after the spiky blossoming blackthorn that crested the opposite hedge. Remarkable accident! She had not seen him!

In a moment Lewisham's legs were flying over the stile. He went down the steps in the bank with such impetus that it carried him up into the prickly bushes beside her. "Allow me," he said, too excited to see she was not astonished.

"Mr. Lewisham!" she said in feigned surprise, and stood away to give him room at the blackthorn.

"Which spike will you have?" he cried overjoyed. "The whitest? The highest? Any!"

"That piece," she chose haphazard, "with the black spike sticking out from it."

A mass of snowy blossom it was against the April sky, and Lewisham, struggling for it—it was by no means the most accessible—saw with fantastic satisfaction a lengthy scratch flash white on his hand, and turn to red.

"Higher up the lane," he said, descending triumphant and breathless, "there is blackthorn. . . . This cannot compare for a moment. . . ."

She laughed and looked at him as he stood there flushed, his eyes triumphant, with an unpremeditated approval. In church, in the gallery, with his face foreshortened, he had been effective in a way, but this was different. "Show me," she said, though she knew this was the only place for blackthorn for a mile in either direction.

"I *knew* I should see you," he said, by way of answer. "I felt sure I should see you to-day."

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"It was our last chance almost," she answered with as frank a quality of avowal. "I'm going home to London on Monday."

"I knew," he cried in triumph. "To Clapham?" he asked.

"Yes. I have got a situation. You did not know that I was a shorthand clerk and typist, did you? I am. I have just left the school, the Grogam School. And now there is an old gentleman who wants an amanuensis."

"So you know shorthand?" said he. "That accounts for the stylographic pen. Those lines were written. . . . I have them still."

She smiled and raised her eyebrows. "Here," said Mr. Lewisham tapping his breast-pocket.

"This lane," he said—their talk was curiously inconsecutive—"some way along this lane, over the hill and down, there is a gate, and that goes—I mean, it opens into the path that runs along the river bank. Have you been?"

"No," she said.

"It's the best walk about Whortley. It brings you out upon Immering Common. You *must*—before you go."

"*Now?*" she said with her eyes dancing.

"Why not?"

"I told Mrs. Frobisher I should be back by four," she said.

"It's a walk not to be lost."

"Very well," said she.

"The trees are all budding," said Mr. Lewisham, "the rushes are shooting, and all along the edge of

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the river there are millions of little white flowers floating on the water. *I don't know the names of them, but they're fine. . . . May I carry that branch of blossom?"*

As he took it their hands touched momentarily . . . and there came another of those significant gaps.

"Look at those clouds," said Lewisham abruptly remembering the remark he had been about to make and waving the white froth of blackthorn. "And look at the blue between them."

"It's perfectly splendid. Of all the fine weather the best had been kept for now. My last day. My very last day."

And off these two young people went together in a highly electrical state—to the infinite astonishment of Mrs. Frobisher, who was looking out of the attic window—stepping out manfully and finding the whole world lit and splendid for their entertainment. The things they discovered and told each other that afternoon down by the river!—that spring was wonderful, young leaves beautiful, bud scales astonishing things, and clouds dazzling and stately!—with an air of supreme originality! And their naïve astonishment to find one another in agreement upon these novel delights! It seemed to them quite outside the play of accident that they should have met each other.

They went by the path that runs among the trees along the river bank, and she must needs repent and wish to take the lower one, the towing path, before they had gone three hundred yards. So Lewisham

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had to find a place fit for her descent, where a friendly tree proffered its protruding roots as a convenient balustrade, and down she clambered with her hand in his.

Then a water-vole washing his whiskers gave occasion for a sudden touching of hands and the intimate confidence of whispers and silence together. After which Lewisham essayed to gather her a marsh mallow at the peril, as it was judged, of his life, and gained it together with a bootful of water. And at the gate by the black and shiny lock, where the path breaks away from the river, she overcame him by an unexpected feat, climbing gleefully to the top rail with the support of his hand, and leaping down, a figure of light and grace, to the ground.

They struck boldly across the meadows, which were gay with lady's smock, and he walked, by special request, between her and three matronly cows—feeling as Perseus might have done when he fended off the sea-monster. And so by the mill, and up a steep path to Immering Common. Across the meadows Lewisham had broached the subject of her occupation. “And are you really going away from here to be an amanuensis?” he said, and started her upon the theme of herself, a theme she treated with a specialist's enthusiasm. They dealt with it by the comparative method, and neither noticed the light was out of the sky until the soft feet of the advancing shower had stolen right upon them.

“Look!” said he. “Yonder! A shed,” and they ran together. She ran laughing, and yet swiftly and

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lightly. He pulled her through the hedge by both hands, and released her skirt from an amorous bramble, and so they came into a little black shed in which sheltered a rusty harrow of gigantic proportions. He noted how she still kept her breath after that run.

She sat down on the harrow and hesitated. "I *must* take off my hat," she said, "that rain will spot it," and so he had a chance of admiring the sincerity of her curls—not that he had ever doubted them. She stooped over her hat, pocket-handkerchief in hand, daintily wiping off the silvery drops. He stood up at the opening of the shed and looked at the country outside through the veil of the soft vehemence of the April shower.

"There's room for two on this harrow," she said.

He made inarticulate sounds of refusal, and then came and sat down beside her, close beside her, so that he was almost touching her. He felt a fantastic desire to take her in his arms and kiss her, and overcame the madness by an effort. "I don't even know your name," he said, taking refuge from his whirling thoughts in conversation.

"Henderson," she said.

"*Miss* Henderson?"

She smiled in his face—hesitated. "Yes—*Miss* Henderson."

Her eyes, her atmosphere were wonderful. He had never felt quite the same sensation before, a strange excitement, almost like a faint echo of tears. He was for demanding her Christian name. For calling her "dear" and seeing what she would say.

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He plunged headlong into a rambling description of Bonover and how he had told a lie about her and called her Miss Smith, and so escaped this unaccountable emotional crisis. . . .

The whispering of the rain about them sank and died, and the sunlight struck vividly across the distant woods beyond Immering. Just then they had fallen again into a silence that was full of daring thoughts for Mr. Lewisham. He moved his arm suddenly and placed it so that it was behind her on the frame of the harrow.

"Let us go on now," she said abruptly. "The rain has stopped."

"That little path goes straight to Immering," said Mr. Lewisham.

"But, four o'clock?"

He drew out his watch and his eyebrows went up. It was already nearly a quarter past four.

"Is it past four?" she asked, and abruptly they were face to face with parting. That Lewisham had to take "duty" at half-past five seemed a thing utterly trivial. "Surely," he said, only slowly realising what this parting meant. "But must you? I—I want to talk to you."

"Haven't you been talking to me?"

"It isn't that. Besides—no."

She stood looking at him. "I promised to be home by four," she said. "Mrs. Frobisher has tea. . . ."

"We may never have a chance to see one another again."

"Well?"

Lewisham suddenly turned very white.

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“Don’t leave me,” he said, breaking a tense silence and with a sudden stress in his voice. “Don’t leave me. Stop with me yet—for a little while. . . . You . . . You can lose your way.”

“You seem to think,” she said, forcing a laugh, “that I live without eating and drinking.”

“I have wanted to talk to you so much. The first time I saw you. . . . At first I dared not . . . I did not know you would let me talk. . . . And now, just as I am—happy, you are going.”

He stopped abruptly. Her eyes were downcast. “No,” she said, tracing a curve with the point of her shoe. “No. I am not going.”

Lewisham restrained an impulse to shout. “You will come to Immering?” he cried, and as they went along the narrow path through the wet grass, he began to tell her with simple frankness how he cared for her company. “I would not change this,” he said, casting about for an offer to reject, “for—anything in the world. . . . I shall not be back for duty. I don’t care. I don’t care what happens so long as we have this afternoon.”

“Nor I,” she said.

“Thank you for coming,” he said in an outburst of gratitude. “Oh, thank you for coming,” and held out his hand. She took it and pressed it, and so they went on hand in hand until the village street was reached. Their high resolve to play truant at all costs had begotten a wonderful sense of fellowship. “I can’t call you Miss Henderson,” he said. “You know I can’t. You know . . . I must have your Christian name.”

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“Ethel,” she told him.

“Ethel,” he said and looked at her, gathering courage as he did so. “Ethel,” he repeated. “It is a pretty name. But no name is quite pretty enough for you, Ethel . . . *dear.*” . . .

The small shop in Immering lay back behind a garden full of wallflowers, and was kept by a very fat and very cheerful little woman, who insisted on regarding them as brother and sister, and calling them both “dearie.” These points conceded she gave them an admirable tea of astonishing cheapness. Lewisham did not like the second condition very much, because it seemed to touch on his latest enterprise. But the tea and the bread and butter and the whort jam were like no food on earth. There were wallflowers, heavy scented, in a jug upon the table, and Ethel admired them, and when they set out again the little old lady insisted on her taking a bunch with her.

It was after they left Immering that this ramble, properly speaking, became scandalous. The sun was already a golden ball above the blue hills in the west—it turned our two young people into figures of flame—and yet, instead of going homeward, they took the Wentworth road that plunges into the Forshaw woods. Behind them the moon, almost full, hung in the blue sky above the tree-tops, ghostly and indistinct, and slowly gathered to itself such light as the setting sun left for it in the sky.

Going out of Immering they began to talk of the future. And for the very young lover there is no future but the immediate future.

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“You must write to me,” he said, and she told him she wrote such *silly* letters. “But I shall have reams to write to you,” he told her.

“How are you to write to me?” she asked, and they discussed a new obstacle between them. It would never do to write home—never. She was sure of that with an absolute assurance. “My mother—” she said and stopped.

That prohibition cut him, for at that time he had the makings of a voluminous letter-writer. Yet it was only what one might expect. The whole world was unpropitious—obdurate indeed. . . . A splendid isolation *à deux*.

Perhaps she might find some place where letters might be sent to her? Yet that seemed to her deceitful.

So these two young people wandered on, full of their discovery of love, and yet so full too of the shyness of adolescence that the word “Love” never passed their lips that day. Yet as they talked on, and the kindly dusk gathered about them, their speech and their hearts came very close together. But their speech would seem so threadbare, written down in cold blood, that I must not put it here. To them it was not threadbare.

When at last they came down the long road into Whortley, the silent trees were black as ink and the moonlight made her face pallid and wonderful, and her eyes shone like stars. She still carried the black-thorn from which most of the blossoms had fallen. The fragrant wallflowers were fragrant still. And far away, softened by the distance, the Whortley

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band, performing publicly outside the vicarage for the first time that year, was playing with unctuous slowness a sentimental air. I don't know if the reader remembers it, that favourite melody of the early eighties:—

“Sweet dreamland faces, passing to and fro, (pum, pum)
Bring back to Mem'ry days of long ago-o-o-oh”

was the essence of it, very slow and tender and with an accompaniment of pum, pum. Pathetically cheerful that pum, pum, hopelessly cheerful indeed against the dirge of the air, a dirge accentuated by sporadic vocalisation. But to young people things come differently.

“I *love* music,” she said.

“So do I,” said he.

They came on down the steepness of West Street. They walked athwart the metallic and leathery tumult of sound into the light cast by the little circle of yellow lamps. Several people saw them and wondered what the boys and girls were coming to nowadays, and one eye-witness even subsequently described their carriage as “brazen.” Mr. Lewisham was wearing his mortar-board cap of office—there was no mistaking him. They passed the Proprietary School and saw a yellow picture framed and glazed, of Mr. Bonover taking duty for his aberrant assistant master. And outside the Frobisher house at last they parted perforce.

“Good-bye,” he said for the third time. “Good-bye, Ethel.”

She hesitated. Then suddenly she darted towards

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him. He felt her hands upon his shoulders, her lips soft and warm upon his cheek, and before he could take hold of her she had eluded him, and had flitted into the shadow of the house. "Good-bye," came her sweet, clear voice out of the shadow, and while he yet hesitated an answer, the door opened.

He saw her, black in the doorway, heard some indistinct words, and then the door closed and he was alone in the moonlight, his cheek still glowing from her lips. . . .

So ended Mr. Lewisham's first day with Love.

CHAPTER VII

THE RECKONING

AND after the day of Love came the days of Reckoning. Mr. Lewisham was astonished—overwhelmed almost—by that Reckoning, as it slowly and steadily unfolded itself. The wonderful emotions of Saturday carried him through Sunday, and he made it up with the neglected Schema by assuring it that She was his Inspiration, and that he would work for Her a thousand times better than he could possibly work for himself. That was certainly not true, and indeed he found himself wondering whither the interest had vanished out of his theological examination of Butler's "Analogy." The Frobishers were not at church for either service. He speculated rather anxiously—why?

Monday dawned coldly and clearly—a Herbert Spencer of a day—and he went to school sedulously assuring himself there was nothing to apprehend. Day boys were whispering in the morning apparently about him, and Frobisher ii. was in great request. Lewisham overheard a fragment. "My mother *was* in a wax," said Frobisher ii.

At twelve came an interview with Bonover, and voices presently rising in angry altercation and audible to Senior-assistant Dunkerley through the closed study door. Then Lewisham walked across the schoolroom, staring straight before him, his cheeks very bright.

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Thereby Dunkerley's mind was prepared for the news that came the next morning over the exercise books. "When?" said Dunkerley.

"End of next term," said Lewisham.

"About this girl that's been staying at the Frobershers?"

"Yes."

"She's a pretty bit of goods. But it will mess up your matric next June," said Dunkerley.

"That's what I'm sorry for."

"It's scarcely to be expected he'll give you leave to attend the exam. . . ."

"He won't," said Lewisham shortly, and opened his first exercise book. He found it difficult to talk.

"He's a greaser," said Dunkerley. "But there!—what can you expect from Durham?" For Bonover had only a Durham degree and Dunkerley, having none, inclined to be particular. Therewith Dunkerley lapsed into a sympathetic and busy rustling over his own pile of exercises. It was not until the heap had been reduced to a book or so that he spoke again—an elaborate point.

"Male and female created He them," said Dunkerley ticking his way down the page. "Which (tick, tick) was damned hard (tick, tick) on assistant masters."

He closed the book with a snap and flung it on the floor behind him. "You're lucky," he said. "I *did* think I should be first to get out of this scandalising hole. You're lucky. It's always acting down here. Running on parents and guardians round every corner. That's what I object to in

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life in the country: it's so confoundedly artificial. *I shall take jolly good care I get out of it just as soon as ever I can. You bet!*"

"And work those patents?"

"Rather, my boy. Yes. Work those patents. The Patent Square Top Bottle! Lord! Once let me get to London. . . ."

"I think *I shall have a shot at London,*" said Lewisham.

And then the experienced Dunkerley, being one of the kindest young men alive, forgot certain private ambitions of his own—he cherished dreams of amazing patents—and bethought him of agents. He proceeded to give a list of these necessary helpers of the assistant master at the gangway—Orellana, Gabbitas, The Lancaster Gate Agency, and the rest of them. He knew them all—intimately. He had been a "nix" eight years. "Of course that Kensington thing may come off," said Dunkerley, "but it's best not to wait. I tell you frankly—the chances are against you."

The "Kensington thing" was an application for admission to the Normal School of Science at South Kensington, which Lewisham had made in a sanguine moment. There being an inadequate supply of qualified science teachers in England, the Science and Art Department is wont to offer free instruction at its great central school, and a guinea a week, to select young pedagogues who will bind themselves to teach science after their training is over. Dunkerley had been in the habit of applying for several years, always in vain, and Lewisham had seen no

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harm in following his example. But then Dunkerley had no green-grey certificates.

So Lewisham spent all that "duty" left him of the next day composing a letter to copy out and send the several scholastic agencies. In this he gave a brief but appreciative sketch of his life, and enlarged upon his discipline and educational methods. At the end was a long and decorative schedule of his certificates and distinctions, beginning with a good-conduct prize at the age of eight. A considerable amount of time was required to recopy this document, but his modesty upheld him. After a careful consideration of the time table, he set aside the midday hour for "Correspondence."

He found that his work in mathematics and classics was already some time in arrears, and a "test" he had sent to his correspondence tutor during those troublous days after the meeting with Bonover in the Avenue, came back blottesquely indorsed: "Below Pass Standard." This last experience was so unprecedented and annoyed him so much that for a space he contemplated retorting with a sarcastic letter to the tutor. And then came the Easter recess, and he had to go home and tell his mother, with a careful suppression of details, that he was leaving Whortley. "Where you have been getting on so well!" cried his mother.

But that dear old lady had one consolation. She observed he had given up his glasses—he had forgotten to bring them with him—and her secret fear of grave optical troubles that were being "kept" from her, was alleviated.

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Sometimes he had moods of intense regret for the folly of that walk. One such came after the holidays, when the necessity of revising the dates of the Schema brought before his mind, for the first time quite clearly, the practical issue of this first struggle with those mysterious and powerful influences the spring-time sets a-stirring. His dream of success and fame had been very real and dear to him, and the realisation of the inevitable postponement of his long anticipated matriculation, the doorway to all the other great things, took him abruptly like an actual physical sensation in his chest.

He sprang up, pen in hand, in the midst of his corrections, and began pacing up and down the room. "What a fool I have been!" he cried. "What a fool I have been!"

He flung the pen on the floor and made a rush at an ill-drawn attempt upon a girl's face that adorned the end of his room, the visible witness of his slavery. He tore this down and sent the fragments of it scattering. . . .

"Fool!"

It was a relief—a definite abandonment. He stared for a moment at the destruction he had made, and then went back to the revision of the timetable, with a mutter about "silly spooning."

That was one mood. The rarer one. He watched the posts with far more eagerness for the address to which he might write to her than for any reply to those reiterated letters of application, the writing of which now ousted Horace and the higher mathematics (Lewisham's term for conics) from his

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attention. Indeed he spent more time meditating the letter to her than even the schedule of his virtues had required.

Yet the letters of application were wonderful compositions; each had a new pen to itself and was for the first page at least in a handwriting far above even his usual high standard. And day after day passed and that particular letter he hoped for still did not come.

His moods were complicated by the fact that, in spite of his studied reticence on the subject, the reason of his departure did in an amazingly short time get "all over Whortley." It was understood that he had been discovered to be "fast," and Ethel's behaviour was animadverted upon with complacent indignation—if the phrase may be allowed—by the ladies of the place. Pretty looks were too often a snare. One boy—his ear was warmed therefor—once called aloud "Ethel," as Lewisham went by. The curate, a curate of the pale-faced, large-knuckled, nervous sort, now passed him without acknowledgment of his existence. Mrs. Bonover took occasion to tell him that he was a "mere boy," and once Mrs. Frobisher sniffed quite threateningly at him when she passed him in the street. She did it so suddenly she made him jump.

This general disapproval inclined him at times to depression, but in certain moods he found it exhilarating, and several times he professed himself to Dunkerley not a little of a blade. In others, he told himself he bore it for *her* sake. Anyhow he had to bear it.

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He began to find out too, how little the world feels the need of a young man of nineteen—he called himself nineteen, though he had several months of eighteen still to run—even though he adds prizes for good conduct, general improvement, and arithmetic, and advanced certificates signed by a distinguished engineer and headed with the Royal Arms, guaranteeing his knowledge of geometrical drawing, nautical astronomy, animal physiology, physiography, inorganic chemistry and building construction, to his youth and strength and energy. At first he had imagined headmasters clutching at the chance of him, and presently he found himself clutching eagerly at them. He began to put a certain urgency into his applications for vacant posts, an urgency that helped him not at all. The applications grew longer and longer until they ran to four sheets of note-paper—a pennyworth in fact. “I can assure you,” he would write, “that you will find me a loyal and devoted assistant.” Much in that strain. Dunkerley pointed out that Bonover’s testimonial ignored the question of moral character and discipline in a marked manner, and Bonover refused to alter it. He was willing to do what he could to help Lewisham, in spite of the way he had been treated, but unfortunately his conscience . . .

Once or twice Lewisham misquoted the testimonial—to no purpose. And May was half-way through, and South Kensington was silent. The future was grey.

And in the depths of his doubt and disappointment came her letter. It was typewritten on thin

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paper. "Dear," she wrote simply, and it seemed to him the most sweet and wonderful of all possible modes of address, though as a matter of fact it was because she had forgotten his Christian name and afterwards forgotten the blank she had left for it.

"Dear, I could not write before because I have no room at home now where I can write a letter, and Mrs. Frobisher told my mother falsehoods about you. My mother has surprised me dreadfully—I did not think it of her. She told me nothing. But of that I must tell you in another letter. I am too angry to write about it now. Even now you cannot write back, for *you must not send letters here*. It would *never* do. But I think of you, dear,"—the "dear" had been erased and rewritten—"and I must write and tell you so, and of that nice walk we had, if I never write again. I am very busy now. My work is rather difficult and I am afraid I am a little stupid. It is hard to be interested in anything just because that is how you have to live, is it not? I daresay you sometimes feel the same of school. But I suppose everybody is doing things they don't like. I don't know when I shall come to Whortley again, if ever, but very likely you will be coming to London. Mrs. Frobisher said the most horrid things. It would be nice if you could come to London, because then perhaps you might see me. There is a big boy's school at Chelsea, and when I go by it every morning I wish you were there. Then you would come out in your cap and gown as I went by. Suppose some day I was to see you there suddenly!!"

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So it ran, with singularly little information in it, and ended quite abruptly, "Good-bye, dear. Good-bye, dear," scribbled in pencil. And then, "Think of me sometimes."

Reading it, and especially that opening "dear," made Lewisham feel the strangest sensation in his throat and chest, almost as though he was going to cry. So he laughed instead and read it again, and went to and fro in his little room with his eyes bright and that precious writing held in his hand. That "dear" was just as if she had spoken—a voice suddenly heard. He thought of her farewell, clear and sweet, out of the shadow of the moonlit house.

But why that "If I never write again," and that abrupt ending? Of course he would think of her.

It was her only letter. In a little time its creases were worn through.

Early in June came a loneliness that suddenly changed into almost intolerable longing to see her. He had vague dreams of going to London, to Clapham, to find her. But you do not find people in Clapham as you do in Whortley. He spent an afternoon writing and re-writing a lengthy letter, against the day when her address should come. If it was to come. He prowled about the village disconsolately, and at last set off about seven and retraced by moonlight almost every step of that one memorable walk of theirs.

In the blackness of the shed he worked himself up to the pitch of talking as if she were present. And he said some fine brave things.

He found the little old lady of the wallflowers

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with a candle in her window, and drank a bottle of ginger beer with a sacramental air. The little old lady asked him, a trifle archly, after his sister, and he promised to bring her again some day. "I'll certainly bring her," he said. Talking to the little old lady somehow blunted his sense of desolation. And then home through the white indistinctness in a state of melancholy that became at last so fine as to be almost pleasurable.

The day after that mood a new "text" attracted and perplexed Mrs. Munday, an inscription at once mysterious and familiar, and this inscription was:

Qizpah.

It was in Old English lettering and evidently very carefully executed.

Where had she seen it before?

It dominated all the rest of the room at first, it flaunted like a flag of triumph over "discipline" and the time-table and the Schema. Once indeed it was taken down, but the day after it reappeared. Later a list of scholastic vacancies partially obscured it, and some pencil memoranda were written on the margin.

And when at last the time came for him to pack up and leave Whortley, he took it down and used it with several other suitable papers—the Schema and the time-table were its next-door neighbours—to line the bottom of the yellow box in which he packed his books: chiefly books for that matriculation that had now to be postponed.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CAREER PREVAILS

THERE is an interval of two years and a half and the story resumes with a much maturer Mr. Lewisham, indeed no longer a youth but a man, a legal man, at any rate, of one and twenty years. Its scene is no longer little Whortley embedded among its trees, ruddy banks, parks and common land, but the grey spaciousness of West London.

And it does not resume with Ethel at all. For that promised second letter never reached him, and though he spent many an afternoon during his first few months in London, wandering about Clapham, that arid waste of people, the meeting that he longed for never came. Until at last after the manner of youth, so gloriously recuperative in body, heart, and soul, he began to forget.

The quest of a "crib" had ended in the unexpected fruition of Dunkerley's blue paper. The green-blue certificates had, it seemed, a value beyond mural decoration, and when Lewisham was already despairing of any employment for the rest of his life, came a marvellous blue document from the Education Department promising inconceivable things. He was to go to London and be paid a guinea a week for listening to lectures—lectures beyond his most ambitious dreams! Among the names that swam before his eyes was Huxley—Huxley and then Lockyer! What a chance to get!

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Is it any wonder that for three memorable years the Career prevailed with him?

You figure him on his way to the Normal School of Science at the opening of his third year of study there. (They call the place the Royal College of Science in these latter days.) He carried in his right hand a shiny black bag, well stuffed with text-books, notes, and apparatus for the forthcoming session; and in his left was a book that the bag had no place for, a book with gilt edges, and its binding very carefully protected by a brown paper cover.

The lapse of time had asserted itself upon his upper lip in an inaggressive but indisputable moustache, in an added inch or so of stature, and in his less conscious carriage. For he no longer felt that universal attention he believed in at eighteen; it was beginning to dawn on him indeed that quite a number of people were entirely indifferent to the fact of his existence. But if less conscious, his carriage was decidedly more confident—as of one with whom the world goes well.

His costume was, with one exception, a tempered black,—mourning put to hard uses and, “cutting up rusty.” The mourning was for his mother, who had died more than a year before the date when this story resumes, and had left him property that capitalized at nearly a hundred pounds, a sum which Lewisham hoarded jealously in the Savings Bank, paying only for such essentials as university fees, and the books and instruments his brilliant career as a student demanded. For he was having a brilliant career after all, in spite of

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the Whortley check, licking up paper certificates indeed like a devouring flame.

(Surveying him, Madam, your eye would inevitably have fallen to his collar—curiously shiny, a surface like wet gum. Although it has practically nothing to do with this story, I must, I know, dispose of that before I go on, or you will be inattentive. London has its mysteries, but this strange gloss on his linen! “Cheap laundresses always make your things blue,” protests the lady. “It ought to have been blue-stained, generously frayed, and loose about the button, fretting his neck. But this gloss . . .” You would have looked nearer, and finally you would have touched—a charnel-house surface, dank and cool! You see, Madam, the collar was a patent waterproof one. One of those you wash over night with a tooth-brush, and hang on the back of your chair to dry, and there you have it next morning, rejuvenesced. It was the only collar he had in the world, it saved three pence a week at least, and that, to a South Kensington “science teacher in training,” living on the guinea a week allowed by a parental but parsimonious government, is a sum to consider. It had come to Lewisham as a great discovery. He had seen it first in a shop window full of indiarubber goods, and it lay at the bottom of a glass bowl in which goldfish drifted discontentedly to and fro. And he told himself that he rather liked that gloss.)

But the wearing of a bright red tie would have been unexpected—a bright red tie after the fashion of a South-Western railway guard’s! The rest of

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him by no means dandiacal, even the vanity of glasses long since abandoned. You would have reflected. . . . Where had you seen a crowd—red ties abundant and in some way significant? The truth has to be told. Mr. Lewisham had become a Socialist!

That red tie was indeed but one outward and visible sign of much inward and spiritual development. Lewisham, in spite of the demands of a studious career, had read his Butler's "Analogy" through by this time, and some other books; he had argued, had had doubts, and called upon God for "Faith" in the silence of the night—"Faith" to be delivered immediately if Mr. Lewisham's patronage was valued, and which nevertheless was not so delivered. . . . And his conception of his destiny in this world was no longer an avenue of examinations to a remote Bar and political eminence "in the Liberal interest (D. V.)." He had begun to realise certain aspects of our social order that Whortley did not demonstrate, begun to feel something of the dull stress deepening to absolute wretchedness and pain, which is the colour of so much human life in modern London. One vivid contrast hung in his mind symbolical. On the one hand were the coalies of the Westbourne Park yards, on strike and gaunt and hungry, children begging in the black slush, and starving loungers outside a soup kitchen; and on the other, Westbourne Grove, two streets further, a blazing array of crowded shops, a stirring traffic of cabs and carriages, and such a spate of spending that a tired student in leaky boots

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and graceless clothes hurrying home was continually impeded in the whirl of skirts and parcels and sweetly pretty womanliness. No doubt the tired student's own inglorious sensations pointed the moral. But that was only one of a perpetually recurring series of vivid approximations.

Lewisham had a strong persuasion, an instinct it may be, that human beings should not be happy while others near them were wretched, and this gay glitter of prosperity had touched him with a sense of crime. He still believed people were responsible for their own lives; in those days he had still to gauge the possibilities of moral stupidity in himself and his fellow-men. He happened upon "Progress and Poverty" just then, and some casual numbers of the "Commonweal," and it was only too easy to accept the theory of cunning plotting capitalists and landowners, and faultless, righteous, martyr workers. He became a Socialist forthwith. The necessity to do something at once to manifest the new faith that was in him was naturally urgent. So he went out and (historical moment) bought that red tie!

"Blood colour, please," said Lewisham meekly to the young lady at the counter.

"*What* colour?" said the young lady at the counter, sharply.

"A bright scarlet, please," said Lewisham, blushing. And he spent the best part of the evening and much of his temper in finding out how to tie this into a neat bow. It was a plunge into novel handicraft—for previously he had been accustomed to made-up ties.

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So it was that Lewisham proclaimed the Social Revolution. The first time that symbol went abroad a string of stalwart policemen were walking in single file along the Brompton Road. In the opposite direction marched Lewisham. He began to hum. He passed the policemen with a significant eye and humming the *Marseillaise*. . . .

But that was months ago, and by this time the red tie was a thing of use and wont.

He turned out of the Exhibition Road through a gateway of wrought iron, and entered the hall of the Normal School. The hall was crowded with students carrying books, bags, and boxes of instruments, students standing and chattering, students reading the framed and glazed notices of the Debating Society, students buying notebooks, pencils, rubber, or drawing pins from the privileged stationer. There was a strong representation of new hands, the paying students, youths and young men in black coats and silk hats or tweed suits, the scholar contingent, youngsters of Lewisham's class, raw, shabby, discordant, grotesquely ill-dressed and awe-stricken; one Lewisham noticed with a sailor's peaked cap gold-decorated, and one with mittens and very genteel grey kid gloves; and Grummett the perennial Official of the Books was busy among them.

"Der Zozalist!" said a wit.

Lewisham pretended not to hear and blushed vividly. He often wished he did not blush quite so much, seeing he was a man of one and twenty. He looked studiously away from the Debating Society notice board, whereon "G. E. Lewisham on Social-

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ism" was announced for the next Friday, and struggled through the hall to where the Book awaited his signature. Presently he was hailed by name, and then again. He could not get to the Book for a minute or so, because of the hand-shaking and clumsy friendly jests of his fellow-"men."

He was pointed out to a raw hand, by the raw hand's experienced fellow-townsmen, as "that beast Lewisham—awful swat. He was second last year on the year's work. Frightful mugger. But all these swats have a touch of the beastly prig. Exams—Debating Society—more Exams. Don't seem to have ever heard of being alive. Never goes near a Music Hall from one year's end to the other."

Lewisham heard a shrill whistle, made a run for the lift and caught it just on the point of departure. The lift was unlit and full of black shadows; only the sapper who conducted it was distinct. As Lewisham peered doubtfully at the dim faces near him, a girl's voice addressed him by name.

"Is that you, Miss Heydinger?" he answered. "I didn't see. I hope you have had a pleasant vacation."

CHAPTER IX

ALICE HEYDINGER

WHEN he arrived at the top of the building he stood aside for the only remaining passenger to step out before him. It was the Miss Heydinger who had addressed him, the owner of that gilt-edged book in the cover of brown paper. No one else had come all the way up from the ground floor. The rest of the load in the lift had emerged at the "astronomical" and "chemical" floors, but these two had both chosen "zoology" for their third year of study, and zoology lived in the attics. She stepped into the light, with a rare touch of colour springing to her cheeks in spite of herself. Lewisham perceived an alteration in her dress. Perhaps she was looking for and noticed the transitory surprise in his face.

The previous session—their friendship was now nearly a year old—it had never once dawned upon him that she could possibly be pretty. The chief thing he had been able to recall with any definiteness during the vacation was that her hair was not always tidy and that even when it chanced to be so, she was nervous about it; she distrusted it. He remembered her gesture while she talked, a patting exploration that verged on the exasperating. From that he went on to remember that its colour was on the whole fair, a light brown. But he had forgotten her mouth, he had failed to name the colour of her

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eyes. She wore glasses, it is true. And her dress was indefinite in his memory—an amorphous dinginess.

And yet he had seen a good deal of her. They were not in the same course, but he had made her acquaintance on the committee of the school Debating Society. Lewisham was just then discovering Socialism. That had afforded a basis of conversation—an incentive to intercourse. She seemed to find something rarely interesting in his peculiar view of things, and, as chance would have it, he met her accidentally quite a number of times, in the corridors of the schools, in the big Education Library, and in the Art Museum. After a time those meetings appear to have been no longer accidental.

Lewisham for the first time in his life began to fancy he had conversational powers. She resolved to stir up his ambitions—an easy task. She thought he had exceptional gifts and that she might serve to direct them; she certainly developed his vanity. She had matriculated at London University and they took the Intermediate Examination in Science together in July—she a little unwisely—which served, as almost anything will serve in such cases, as a further link between them. She failed, but that in no way diminished Lewisham's regard for her. On the examination days they discoursed about Friendship in general, and things like that, down the Burlington Arcade during the lunch time,—Burlington Arcade undisguisedly amused by her learned dinginess and his red tie—and among other things that were said she reproached him for not reading poetry. When they parted in Piccadilly after the

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examination, they agreed to write about poetry and themselves during the holidays, and then she lent him, with a touch of hesitation, Rossetti's poems. He began to forget what had at first been very evident to him, that she was two or three years older than he.

Lewisham spent the vacation with an unsympathetic but kindly uncle who was a plumber and builder. His uncle had a family of six, the eldest eleven, and Lewisham made himself agreeable and instructive. Moreover he worked hard for the culminating third year of his studies (in which he had decided to do great things) and he learned to ride the Ordinary Bicycle. He also thought about Miss Heydinger, and she, it would seem, thought about him.

He argued on social questions with his uncle, who was a prominent local Conservative. His uncle's controversial methods were coarse in the extreme. Socialists, he said, were thieves. The object of Socialism was to take away what a man earned and give it to "a lot of lazy scoundrels." Also rich people were necessary. "If there weren't well-off people, how d'ye think I'd get a livin'? Hey? And where'd *you* be then?" Socialism, his uncle assured him, was "got up" by agitators. "They get money out of young Gabies like you, and they spend it on champagne." And thereafter he met Mr. Lewisham's arguments with the word "Champagne" uttered in an irritating voice, followed by a luscious pantomime of drinking.

Naturally Lewisham felt a little lonely, and per-

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haps he laid stress upon it in his letters to Miss Heydinger. It came to light that she felt rather lonely too. They discussed the question of True as distinguished from Ordinary Friendship, and from that they passed to Goethe and Elective Affinities. He told her how he looked for her letters, and they became more frequent. Her letters were indisputably well written. Had he been a journalist with a knowledge of "*per thou*," he would have known each for a day's work. After the practical plumber had been asking what he expected to make by this here science of his, re-reading her letters was balsamic. He liked Rossetti—the exquisite sense of separation in "The Blessed Damozel" touched him. But on the whole he was a little surprised at Miss Heydinger's taste in poetry. Rossetti was so sensuous . . . so florid. He had scarcely expected that sort of thing.

Altogether he had returned to the schools decidedly more interested in her than when they had parted. And the curious vague memories of her appearance as something a little frayed and careless, vanished at sight of her emerging from the darkness of the lift. Her hair was in order—as the light glanced through it it looked even pretty—and she wore a well-made dark-green and black dress, loose-gathered as was the fashion in those days, that somehow gave a needed touch of warmth to her face. Her hat too was a change from the careless lumpishness of last year, a hat that, to a feminine mind, would have indicated design. It suited her—these things are past a male novelist's explaining.

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“I have this book of yours, Miss Heydinger,” he said.

“I am glad you have written that paper on Socialism,” she replied, taking the brown-covered volume.

They walked along the little passage towards the biological laboratory side by side, and she stopped at the hat pegs to remove her hat. For that was the shameless way of the place, a girl student had to take her hat off publicly, and publicly assume the holland apron that was to protect her in the laboratory. Not even a looking-glass!

“I shall come and hear your paper,” she said.

“I hope you will like it,” said Lewisham at the door of the laboratory.

“And in the vacation I have been collecting evidence about ghosts—you remember our arguments. Though I did not tell you in my letters.”

“I’m sorry you’re still obdurate,” said Lewis- ham. “I thought that was over.”

“And have you read ‘Looking Backwards’?”

“I want to.”

“I have it here with my other books, if you’d care for me to lend it to you. Wait till I reach my table. My hands are so full.”

They entered the laboratory together, Lewis- ham holding the door open courtly-wise, Miss Hey- dinger taking a reassuring pat at her hair. Near the door was a group of four girls, which Miss Heydinger joined, holding the brown-covered book as inconspicuously as possible. Three of them had been through the previous two years with her, and they greeted her by her Christian name. They had

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previously exchanged glances at her appearance in Lewisham's company.

A morose elderly young demonstrator brightened momentarily at the sight of Lewisham. "Well, we've got one of the decent ones anyhow," said the morose elderly young demonstrator, who was apparently taking an inventory, and then brightening still more at a fresh entry. "Ah! and here's Smithers."

CHAPTER X

IN THE GALLERY OF OLD IRON

As one goes into the South Kensington Art Museum from the Brompton Road, the Gallery of Old Iron is overhead to the right. But the way thither is exceedingly devious and not to be revealed to everybody, since the young people who pursue science and art thereabouts set a peculiar value on its seclusion. The gallery is long and narrow and dark, and set with iron gates, iron-bound chests, locks, bolts and bars, fantastic great keys, lamps, and the like, and over the balustrade one may lean and talk of one's finer feelings and regard Michael Angelo's horned Moses, or Trajan's Column (in plaster) rising gigantic out of the hall below and far above the level of the gallery. And here on a Wednesday afternoon were Lewisham and Miss Heydinger, the Wednesday afternoon immediately following that paper upon Socialism that you saw announced on the notice board in the hall.

The paper had been an immense success, closely reasoned, delivered with a disciplined emotion, the redoubtable Smithers practically converted, the reply after the debate methodical and complete, and it may be there were symptoms of that febrile affection known to the vulgar as "swelled 'ed." Lewisham regarded Moses and spoke of his future. Miss Heydinger for the most part watched his face.

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“And then?” said Miss Heydinger.

“One must bring these views prominently before people. I believe still in pamphlets. I have thought . . .” Lewisham paused, it is to be hoped through modesty.

“Yes?” said Miss Heydinger.

“Well—Luther, you know. There is room, I think, in Socialism, for a Luther.”

“Yes,” said Miss Heydinger, imagining it. “Yes—that would be a grand way.”

So it seemed to many people in those days. But eminent reformers have been now for more than seven years going about the walls of the Social Jericho, blowing their own trumpets and shouting—with such small result beyond incidental displays of ill-temper within, that it is hard to recover the fine hopefulness of those departed days.

“Yes,” said Miss Heydinger. “That would be a grand way.”

Lewisham appreciated the quality of personal emotion in her voice. He turned his face towards her, and saw unstinted admiration in her eyes. “It would be a great thing to do,” he said, and added, quite modestly, “if only one could do it.”

“*You* could do it.”

“You think I could?” Lewisham blushed vividly—with pleasure.

“I do. Certainly you could set out to do it. Even to fail hopelessly would be Great. Sometimes . . .”

She hesitated. He looked expectation. “I think sometimes it is greater even to fail than to succeed.”

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“I don’t see that,” said the proposed Luther, and his eyes went back to the Moses. She was about to speak and changed her mind.

Contemplative pause.

“And then, when a great number of people have heard of your views?” she said presently.

“Then I suppose we must form a party and . . . bring things about.”

Another pause — full, no doubt, of elevated thoughts.

“I say,” said Lewisham quite suddenly. “You do put—well—courage into a chap. I shouldn’t have done that Socialism paper if it hadn’t been for you.” He turned round and stood leaning with his back to the Moses, and smiling at her. “You do help a fellow,” he said.

That was one of the vivid moments of Miss Heydinger’s life. She changed colour a little. “Do I?” she said, standing straight and awkward and looking into his face. “I’m . . . glad.”

“I haven’t thanked you for your letters,” said Lewisham. “And I’ve been thinking . . .”

“Yes?”

“We’re first-rate friends, aren’t we? The best of friends.”

She held out her hand and drew a breath. “Yes,” she said as they gripped. He hesitated whether to hold her hand. He looked into her eyes, and at that moment she would have given three quarters of the years she had still to live, to have had eyes and features that could have expressed her. Instead, she felt her face hard, the little muscles of her mouth

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twitching insubordinate, and fancied that her self-consciousness made her eyes dishonest.

“What I mean,” said Lewisham, “is—that this will go on. We’re always going to be friends, side by side.”

“Always. Just as I am able to help you—I will help you. However I can help you, I will.”

“We two,” said Lewisham gripping her hand.

Her face lit. Her eyes were for a moment touched with the beauty of simple emotion. “We two,” she said, and her lips trembled and her throat seemed to swell. She snatched her hand back suddenly and turned her face away. Abruptly she walked towards the end of the gallery, and he saw her fumbling for her handkerchief in the folds of the green and black dress.

She was going to cry!

It set Lewisham marvelling—this totally inappropriate emotion.

He followed her and stood by her. Why cry? He hoped no one would come into the little gallery until her handkerchief was put away. Nevertheless he felt vaguely flattered. She controlled herself, dashed her tears away, and smiled bravely at him with reddened eyes. “I’m sorry,” she said, gulping.

“I am so glad,” she explained.

“But we will fight together. We two. I *can* help you. I know I can help you. And there is such Work to be done in the world!”

“You are very good to help me,” said Lewisham, quoting a phrase from what he had intended to say

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before he found out that he had a hold upon her emotions.

“No!

“Has it ever occurred to you,” she said abruptly, “how little a woman can do alone in the world?”

“Or a man,” he answered after a momentary meditation.

So it was Lewisham enrolled his first ally in the cause of the red tie—of the red tie and of the Greatness that was presently to come. His first ally; for hitherto—save for the indiscretion of his mural inscriptions—he had made a secret of his private ambitions. In that now half-forgotten love affair at Whortley even, he had, in spite of the considerable degree of intimacy attained, said absolutely nothing about his Career.

CHAPTER XI

MANIFESTATIONS

MISS HEYDINGER declined to disbelieve in the spirits of the dead, and this led to controversy in the laboratory over Tea. For the girl students, being in a majority that year, had organised Tea between four o'clock and the advent of the extinguishing policeman at five. And the men students were occasionally invited to Tea. But not more than two of them at a time really participated, because there were only two spare cups after that confounded Simmons broke the third.

Smithers, the square-headed student with the hard grey eyes, argued against the spirits of the dead with positive animosity, while Bletherley, who displayed an orange tie and lank hair in unshorn abundance, was vaguely open-minded. "What is love?" asked Bletherley, "surely that at any rate is immortal!" His remark was considered irrelevant and ignored.

Lewisham, as became the most promising student of the year, weighed the evidence—comprehensively under headings. He dismissed the mediumistic *séances* as trickery.

"Rot and imposture," said Smithers loudly, and with an oblique glance to see if his challenge reached its mark. Its mark was a grizzled little old man with a very small face and very big grey eyes, who had been standing listlessly at one of the laboratory

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windows until the discussion caught him. He wore a brown velvet jacket and was reputed to be enormously rich. His name was Lagune. He was not a regular attendant, but one of those casual outsiders who are admitted to laboratories that are not completely full. He was known to be an ardent spiritualist—it was even said that he had challenged Huxley to a public discussion on materialism, and he came to the biological lectures and worked intermittently in order, he explained, to fight disbelief with its own weapons. He rose greedily to Smithers's controversial bait.

“I say *no!*” he said, calling down the narrow laboratory and following his voice. He spoke with the ghost of a lisp. “Pardon my interrupting, sir. The question interests me profoundly. I hope I don't intrude. Excuse me, sir. Make it personal. Am I a—fool, or an impostor?”

“Well,” parried Smithers with all a South Kensington student's want of polish, “that's a bit personal.”

“Assume, sir, that I am an honest observer.”

“Well?”

“I have *seen* spirits, *heard* spirits, *felt* the touch of spirits.” He opened his pale eyes very widely.

“Fool, then,” said Smithers in an undertone which did not reach the ears of the spiritualist.

“You may have been deceived,” paraphrased Lewisham.

“I can assure you . . . others can see, hear, feel. I have tested, sir. Tested! I have some scientific training and I have employed tests. Scientific and

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exhaustive tests! Every possible way. I ask you, sir—have you given the spirits a chance?”

“It is only paying guineas to humbugs,” said Smithers.

“There you are! Prejudice! Here is a man denies the facts and consequently *won't* see them, won't go near them.”

“But you wouldn't have every man in the three kingdoms who disbelieved in spirits, attend *séances* before he should be allowed to deny?”

“Most assuredly yes. Most assuredly yes! He knows nothing about it till then.”

The argument became heated. The little old gentleman was soon under way. He knew a person of the most extraordinary gifts, a medium . . .

“Paid?” asked Smithers.

“Would you muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn?” said Lagune promptly.

Smithers's derision was manifest.

“Would you distrust a balance because you bought it? Come and see.” Lagune was now very excited and inclined to gesticulate and raise his voice. He invited the whole class incontinently to a series of special *séances*. “Not all at once—the spirits—new influences.” But in sections. “I warn you we may get nothing. But the chances are . . . I would rejoice infinitely . . .”

So it came about that Lewisham consented to witness a spirit-raising. Miss Heydinger it was arranged should be there, and the sceptic Smithers, Lagune, his typist, and the medium would complete the party. Afterwards there was to be another

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party for the others. Lewisham was glad he had the moral support of Smithers. "It's an evening wasted," said Smithers, who had gallantly resolved to make the running for Lewisham in the contest for the Forbes medal. "But I'll prove my case. You see if I don't." They were given an address in Chelsea.

The house, when Lewisham found it at last, proved a large one with such an air of mellowed dignity that he was abashed. He hung his hat up for himself beside a green-trimmed hat of straw in the wide, rich-toned hall. Through an open door he had a glimpse of a palatial study, book-shelves bearing white busts, a huge writing-table lit by a green-shaded electric lamp and covered thickly with papers. The housemaid looked, he thought, with infinite disdain at the rusty mourning and flamboyant tie, and flounced about and led him upstairs.

She rapped, and there was a discussion within. "They're at it already, I believe," she said to Lewisham confidentially. "Mr. Lagune's always at it."

There were sounds of chairs being moved, Smithers's extensive voice making a suggestion and laughing nervously. Lagune appeared opening the door. His grizzled face seemed smaller and his big grey eyes larger than usual.

"We were just going to begin without you," he whispered. "Come along."

The room was furnished even more splendidly than the drawing-room of the Whortley Grammar School, hitherto the finest room (except certain of the State Apartments at Windsor) known to Lewisham. The

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furniture struck him in a general way as akin to that in the South Kensington Museum. His first impression was an appreciation of the vast social superiority of the chairs; it seemed impertinent to think of sitting on anything quite so stately. He perceived Smithers standing with an air of bashful hostility against a bookcase. Then he was aware that Lagune was asking them all to sit down. Already seated at the table was the Medium, Chaffery, a benevolent-looking, faintly shabby gentleman with bushy iron-grey side-whiskers, a wide, thin-lipped mouth tucked in at the corners, and a chin like the toe of a boot. He regarded Lewisham critically and disconcertingly over gilt glasses. Miss Heydinger was quite at her ease and began talking at once. Lewisham's replies were less confident than they had been in the Gallery of Old Iron; indeed there was almost a reversal of their positions. She led and he was abashed. He felt obscurely that she had taken an advantage of him. He became aware of another girlish figure in a dark dress on his right.

Every one moved towards the round table in the centre of the room, on which lay a tambourine and a little green box. Lagune developed unsuspected lengths of knobby wrist and finger directing his guests to their seats. Lewisham was to sit next to him, between him and the Medium; beyond the Medium sat Smithers with Miss Heydinger on the other side of him, linked to Lagune by the typist. So sceptics compassed the Medium about. The company was already seated before Lewisham looked across Lagune and met the eyes of the girl next

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that gentleman. It was Ethel! The close green dress, the absence of a hat, and a certain loss of colour made her seem less familiar, but did not prevent the instant recognition. And there was recognition in her eyes.

Immediately she looked away. At first his only emotion was surprise. He would have spoken, but a little thing robbed him of speech. For a moment he was unable to remember her surname. Moreover, the strangeness of his surroundings made him undecided. He did not know what was the proper way to address her—and he still held to the superstition of etiquette. Besides—to speak to her would involve a general explanation to all these people. . . .

“Just leave a pin-point of gas, Mr. Smithers, please,” said Lagune, and suddenly the one surviving jet of the gas chandelier was turned down and they were in darkness. The moment for recognition had passed.

The joining of hands was punctiliously verified, the circle was linked little finger to little finger. Lewisham's abstraction received a rebuke from Smithers. The Medium, speaking in an affable voice, premised that he could promise nothing, he had no “*directing*” power over manifestations. Thereafter ensued a silence. . . .

For a space Lewisham was inattentive to all that happened.

He sat in the breathing darkness, staring at the dim elusive shape that had presented that remembered face. His mind was astonishment mingled with annoyance. He had settled that this girl was

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lost to him for ever. The spell of the old days of longing, of the afternoons that he had spent after his arrival in London, wandering through Clapham with a fading hope of meeting her, had not returned to him. But he was ashamed of his stupid silence, and irritated by the awkwardness of the situation. At one moment he was on the very verge of breaking the compact and saying "Miss Henderson" across the table. . . .

How was it he had forgotten that "Henderson?" He was still young enough to be surprised at forgetfulness.

Smithers coughed, one might imagine with a warning intention.

Lewisham, recalling his detective responsibility with an effort, peered about him, but the room was very dark. The silence was broken ever and again by deep sighs and a restless stirring from the Medium. Out of this mental confusion Lewisham's personal vanity was first to emerge. What did she think of him? Was she peering at him through the darkness even as he peered at her? Should he pretend to see her for the first time when the lights were restored? As the minutes lengthened it seemed as though the silence grew deeper and deeper. There was no fire in the room, and it looked for lack of that glow chilly. A curious scepticism arose in his mind as to whether he had actually seen Ethel or only mistaken some one else for her. He wanted the *séance* over in order that he might look at her again. The old days at Whortley came out of his memory with astonishing detail and yet astonishingly free from emotion. . . .

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He became aware of a peculiar sensation down his back, that he tried to account for as a draught. . . .

Suddenly a beam of cold air came like a touch against his face, and made him shudder convulsively. Then he hoped that she had not marked his shudder. He thought of laughing a low laugh to show he was not afraid. Some one else shuddered too, and he perceived an extraordinarily vivid odour of violets. Lagune's finger communicated a nervous quivering.

What was happening?

The musical box some where on the table began playing a rather trivial, rather plaintive air that was strange to him. It seemed to deepen the silence about him, an accent on the expectant stillness, a thread of tinkling melody spanning an abyss.

Lewisham took himself in hand at this stage. What *was* happening? He must attend. Was he really watching as he should do? He had been wool-gathering. There were no such things as spirits, mediums were humbugs, and he was here to prove that sole remaining Gospel. But he must keep up with things—he was missing points. What was that scent of violets? And who had set the musical box going. The Medium of course: but how? He tried to recall whether he had heard a rustling or detected any movement before the music began. He could not recollect. Come! he must be more on the alert than this!

He became acutely desirous of a successful exposure. He figured the dramatic moment he had prepared with Smithers—Ethel a spectator. He peered suspiciously into the darkness.

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Somebody shuddered again, some one opposite him this time. He felt Lagune's finger quiver still more palpably, and then suddenly the raps began, abruptly, all about him. *Rap!*—making him start violently. A swift percussive sound, tap, rap, dap, under the table, under the chair, in the air, round the cornices. The Medium groaned again and shuddered, and his nervous agitation passed sympathetically round the circle. The music seemed to fade to the vanishing point and grew louder again.

How was it done?

He heard Lagune's voice next him speaking with a peculiar quality of breathless reverence. "The alphabet?" he asked, "shall we—shall we use the alphabet?"

A forcible rap under the table.

"No!" interpreted the voice of the Medium.

The raps were continued everywhere.

Of course it was trickery. Lewisham endeavoured to think what the mechanism was. He tried to determine whether he really had the Medium's little finger touching his. He peered at the dark shape next him. There was a violent rapping with an almost metallic resonance far away behind them. Then the raps ceased, and over the healing silence the little jet of melody from the musical box played alone. And after a moment that ceased also. . . .

The stillness was profound. Mr. Lewisham was now highly strung. Doubts assailed him suddenly, and an overwhelming apprehension, a sense of vast occurrences gathered above him. The darkness was a physical oppression. . . .

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He started. Something had stirred on the table. There was the sharp ping of metal being struck. A number of little crepitating sounds like paper being smoothed. The sound of wind without the movement of air. A sense of a presence hovering over the table.

The excitement of Lagune communicated itself in convulsive tremblings; the Medium's hand quivered. In the darkness on the table something faintly luminous, a greenish-white patch, stirred and hopped slowly among the dim shapes.

The object, whatever it was, hopped higher, rose slowly in the air, expanded. Lewisham's attention followed this slavishly. It was ghostly—unaccountable—marvellous. For the moment he forgot even Ethel. Higher and higher this pallid luminosity rose overhead, and then he saw that it was a ghostly hand and arm, rising, rising. Slowly, deliberately, it crossed the table, seemed to touch Lagune, who shivered. It moved slowly round and touched Lewisham. He gritted his teeth.

There was no mistaking the touch, firm and yet soft, of finger-tips. Almost simultaneously, Miss Heydinger cried out that something was smoothing her hair, and suddenly the musical box set off again with a reel. The faint oval of the tambourine rose, jangled, and Lewisham heard it pat Smithers in the face. It seemed to pass overhead. Immediately a table somewhere beyond the Medium began moving audibly on its casters.

It seemed impossible that the Medium, sitting so still beside him, could be doing all these things—

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grotesquely unmeaning though they might be. After all . . .

The ghostly hand was hovering almost directly in front of Mr. Lewisham's eyes. It hung with a slight quivering. Ever and again its fingers flapped down and rose stiffly again.

Noise! A loud noise it seemed. Something moving? What was it he had to do!

Lewisham suddenly missed the Medium's little finger. He tried to recover it. He could not find it. He caught, held and lost an arm. There was an exclamation. A faint report. A curse close to him bitten in half by the quick effort to suppress it. Tzit! The little pin-point of light flew up with a hiss.

Lewisham, standing, saw a circle of blinking faces turned to the group of two this sizzling light revealed. Smithers was the chief figure of the group; he stood triumphant, one hand on the gas tap, the other gripping the Medium's wrist, and in the Medium's hand—the incriminatory tambourine.

"How's this, Lewisham?" cried Smithers, with the shadows on his face jumping as the gas flared.

"*Caught!*" said Lewisham loudly, rising in his place and avoiding Ethel's eyes.

"What's this?" cried the Medium.

"Cheating," panted Smithers.

"Not so," cried the Medium. "When you turned up the light . . . put my hand up . . . caught tambourine . . . to save head."

"Mr. Smithers," cried Lagune. "Mr. Smithers, this is very wrong. This—shock—"

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The tambourine fell noisily to the floor. The Medium's face changed, he groaned strangely and staggered back. Lagune cried out for a glass of water. Every one looked at the man, expecting him to fall, save Lewisham. The thought of Ethel had flashed back into his mind. He turned to see how she took this exposure in which he was such a prominent actor. He saw her leaning over the table as if to pick up something that lay across it. She was not looking at him, she was looking at the Medium. Her face was set and white. Then, as if she felt his glance, her eyes met his.

She started back, stood erect, facing him with a strange hardness in her eyes.

At the moment Lewisham did not grasp the situation. He wanted to show that he was acting upon equal terms with Smithers in the exposure. For the moment her action simply directed his attention to the object towards which she had been leaning, a thing of shrivelled membrane, a pneumatic glove, lying on the table. This was evidently part of the mediumistic apparatus. He pounced and seized it.

"Look!" he said holding it towards Smithers. "Here is more! What is this?"

He perceived that the girl started. He saw Chafery, the Medium, look instantly over Smithers's shoulders, saw his swift glance of reproach at the girl. Abruptly the situation appeared to Lewisham; he perceived her complicity. And he stood, still in the attitude of triumph, with the evidence against her in his hand! But his triumph had vanished.

"Ah!" cried Smithers, leaning across the table

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to secure it. "*Good* old Lewisham! . . . Now we *have* it. This is better than the tambourine."

His eyes shone with triumph. "Do you see, Mr. Lagune?" said Smithers. "The Medium held this in his teeth and blew it out. There's no denying this. This wasn't falling on your head, Mr. Medium, was it? *This*—this was the luminous hand!"

CHAPTER XII

LEWISHAM IS UNACCOUNTABLE

THAT night, as she went with him to Chelsea station, Miss Heydinger discovered an extraordinary moodiness in Lewisham. She had been vividly impressed by the scene in which they had just participated. For a time she had believed in the manifestations, and the swift exposure had violently revolutionised her ideas. The details of the crisis were a little confused in her mind. She ranked Lewisham with Smithers in the scientific triumph of the evening. On the whole she felt elated. She had no objection to being confuted by Lewisham. But she was angry with the Medium. "It is dreadful," she said. "Living a lie! How can the world grow better, when sane, educated people use their sanity and enlightenment to darken others? It is dreadful!

"He was a horrible man—such an oily, dishonest voice. And the girl—I was sorry for her. She must have been oh!—bitterly ashamed, or why should she have burst out crying? That *did* distress me. Fancy crying like that! It was—yes—*abandon*. But what can one do?"

She paused. Lewisham was walking along, looking straight before him, lost in some grim argument with himself.

"It makes me think of Sludge the Medium," she said.

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He made no answer.

She glanced at him suddenly. "Have you read 'Sludge the Medium'?"

"Eigh?" he said, coming back out of infinity. "What? I beg your pardon. Sludge, the Medium? I thought his name was—it *was*—Chaffery."

He looked at her, clearly very anxious upon this question of fact.

"But I mean Browning's 'Sludge.' You know—the poem."

"No—I'm afraid I don't," said Lewisham.

"I must lend it to you," she said. "It's splendid. It goes to the very bottom of this business."

"Does it?"

"It never occurred to me before. But I see the point clearly now. If people, poor people, are offered money if phenomena happen, it's too much. They are *bound* to cheat. It's bribery—immorality!"

She talked in panting little sentences, because Lewisham was walking in heedless big strides. "I wonder how much—such people—could earn honestly."

Lewisham slowly became aware of the question at his ear. He hurried back from infinity. "How much they could earn honestly? I haven't the slightest idea."

He paused. "The whole of this business puzzles me," he said. "I want to think."

"It's frightfully complex, isn't it?" she said—a little staggered.

But the rest of the way to the station was silence. They parted with the hand-clasp they took a pride in

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—a little perfunctory so far as Lewisham was concerned on this occasion. She scrutinised his face as the train moved out of the station, and tried to account for his mood. He was staring before him at unknown things—as if he had already forgotten her.

He wanted to think! But two heads, she thought, were better than one in a matter of opinion. It troubled her to be so ignorant of his mental states. “How we are wrapped and swathed about—soul from soul!” she thought, staring out of the window at the dim things flying by outside.

Suddenly a fit of depression came upon her. She felt alone—absolutely alone—in a void world.

Presently she returned to external things. She became aware of two people in the next compartment eyeing her critically. Her hand went patting at her hair.

CHAPTER XIII

LEWISHAM INSISTS

ETHEL HENDERSON sat at her machine before the window of Mr. Lagune's study, and stared blankly at the greys and blues of the November twilight. Her face was white, her eyelids were red from recent weeping, and her hands lay motionless in her lap. The door had just slammed behind Lagune.

"Heigh-ho!" she said. "I wish I was dead. Oh! I wish I was out of it all."

She became passive again. "I wonder what I have *done*," she said, "that I should be punished like this."

She certainly looked anything but a Fate-haunted soul, being indeed visibly and immediately a very pretty girl. Her head was shapely and covered with curly dark hair, and the eyebrows above her hazel eyes were clear and dark. Her lips were finely shaped, her mouth was not too small to be expressive, her chin small, and her neck white and full and pretty. There is no need to lay stress upon her nose—it sufficed. She was of a mediocre height, sturdy rather than slender, and her dress was of a pleasant, golden-brown material with the easy sleeves and graceful line of those æsthetic days. And she sat at her typewriter and wished she was dead and wondered what she had *done*.

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The room was lined with bookshelves and conspicuous therein was a long row of foolish pretentious volumes, the "works" of Lagune—the witless, meandering imitation of philosophy that occupied his life. Along the cornices were busts of Plato, Socrates and Newton. Behind Ethel was the great man's desk with its green-shaded electric light, and littered with proofs and copies of *Hesperus*, "A paper for Doubters," which with her assistance he edited, published, compiled, wrote, and (without her help) paid for and read. A pen, flung down forcibly, quivered erect with its one surviving nib in the blotting pad. Mr. Lagune had flung it down.

The collapse of the previous night had distressed him dreadfully, and ever and again before his retreat he had been breaking into passionate monologue. The ruin of a life-work it was, no less. Surely she had known that Chaffery was a cheat. Had she not known? Silence. "After so many kindnesses——"

She had interrupted him with a wailing "Oh, I know—I know."

But Lagune had been remorseless and insisted she had betrayed him, worse—made him ridiculous! Look at the "work" he had undertaken at South Kensington—how could he go on with that now? How could he find the heart? When his own typist sacrificed him to her stepfather's trickery? "Trickery!"

The gesticulating hands became active, the grey eyes dilated with indignation, the piping voice eloquent.

"If he hadn't cheated you, some one else would,"

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was Ethel's inadequate muttered retort, unheard by the seeker after phenomena.

It was perhaps not so bad as dismissal, but it certainly lasted longer. And at home was Chaffery, grimly malignant at her failure to secure that pneumatic glove. He had no right to blame her, he really had not; but a disturbed temper is apt to falsify the scales of justice. The tambourine, he insisted, he could have explained by saying he put up his hand to catch it and protect his head directly Smithers moved. But the pneumatic glove there was no explaining. He had made a chance for her to secure it when he had pretended to faint. It was rubbish to say any one could have been looking on the table then—rubbish.

Beside that significant wreck of a pen stood a little carriage clock in a case, and this suddenly lifted a slender voice and announced *five*. She turned round on her stool and sat staring at the clock. She smiled with the corners of her mouth down. "Home," she said, "and begin again. It's like battledore and shuttlecock. . . .

"I *was* silly. . . .

"I suppose I've brought it on myself. I ought to have picked it up, I suppose. I had time. . . .

"Cheats . . . just cheats.

"I never thought I should see him again. . . .

"He was ashamed, of course. . . . He had his own friends."

For a space she sat still, staring blankly before her. She sighed, rubbed a knuckle in a reddened eye, rose.

She went into the hall where her hat, transfixed by

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a couple of hat pins, hung above her jacket, assumed these garments, and let herself out into the cold grey street.

She had hardly gone twenty yards from Lagune's door before she became aware of a man overtaking her and walking beside her. That kind of thing is a common enough experience to girls who go to and from work in London, and she had had perforce to learn many things since her adventurous Whortley days. She looked stiffly in front of her. The man deliberately got in her way so that she had to stop. She lifted eyes of indignant protest. It was Lewisham—and his face was white.

He hesitated awkwardly and then in silence held out his hand. She took it mechanically. He found his voice. "Miss Henderson," he said.

"What do you want?" she asked faintly.

"I don't know," he said. . . . "I want to talk to you."

"Yes?" Her heart was beating fast.

He found the thing unexpectedly difficult.

"May I—? Are you expecting—? Have you far to go? I would like to talk to you. There is a lot . . ."

"I walk to Clapham," she said. "If you care . . . to come part of the way . . ."

She moved awkwardly. Lewisham took his place at her side. They walked side by side for a moment, their manner constrained, having so much to say that they could not find a word to begin upon.

"Have you forgotten Whortley?" he asked abruptly.

"No."

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He glanced at her; her face was downcast. "Why did you never write?" he asked bitterly.

"I wrote."

"Again, I mean."

"I did—in July."

"I never had it."

"It came back."

"But Mrs. Munday . . ."

"I had forgotten her name. I sent it to the Grammar School."

Lewisham suppressed an exclamation.

"I am very sorry," she said.

They went on again in silence. "Last night," said Lewisham at length. "I have no business to ask. But——"

She took a long breath. "Mr. Lewisham," she said. "That man you saw—the Medium—was my stepfather."

"Well?"

"Isn't that enough?"

Lewisham paused. "No," he said.

There was another constrained silence. "No," he said less dubiously. "I don't care a rap what your stepfather is. Were *you* cheating?"

Her face turned white. Her mouth opened and closed. "Mr. Lewisham," she said deliberately, "you may not believe it, it may sound impossible, but on my honour . . . I did not know—I did not know for certain, that is—that my stepfather . . ."

"Ah!" said Lewisham, leaping at conviction. "Then I was right . . ."

For a moment she stared at him, and then, "I *did*

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know," she said, suddenly beginning to cry. "How can I tell you? It is a lie. I *did* know. I *did* know all the time."

He stared at her in white astonishment. He fell behind her one step, and then in a stride came level again. Then, a silence, a silence that it seemed would never end. She had stopped crying, she was one huge suspense, not daring even to look at his face. And at last he spoke.

"No," he said slowly. "I don't mind even that. I don't care—even if it was that."

Abruptly they turned into the King's Road, with its roar of wheeled traffic and hurrying foot-passengers, and forthwith a crowd of boys with a broken-spirited Guy involved and separated them. In a busy highway of a night one must needs talk disconnectedly in shouted snatches or else hold one's peace. He glanced at her face and saw that it was set again. Presently she turned southward out of the tumult into a street of darkness and warm blinds, and they could go on talking again.

"I understand what you mean," said Lewisham. "I know I do. You knew but you did not want to know. It was like that."

But her mind had been active. "At the end of this road," she said, gulping a sob, "you must go back. It was kind of you to come, Mr. Lewisham. But you were ashamed—you are sure to be ashamed. My employer is a spiritualist, and my stepfather is a professional Medium, and my mother is a spiritualist. You were quite right not to speak to me last night. Quite. It was kind of you to come, but you

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must go back. Life is hard enough as it is . . . You must go back at the end of the road. Go back at the end of the road . . .”

Lewisham made no reply for a hundred yards. “I’m coming on to Clapham,” he said.

They came to the end of the road in silence. Then at the kerb corner she turned and faced him. “Go back,” she whispered.

“No,” he said obstinately, and they stood face to face at the cardinal point of their lives.

“Listen to me,” said Lewisham. “It is hard to say what I feel. I don’t know myself. . . . But I’m not going to lose you like this. I’m not going to let you slip a second time. I was awake about it all last night. I don’t care where you are, what your people are, nor very much whether you’ve kept quite clear of this medium humbug. I don’t. You will in future. Anyhow. I’ve had a day and night to think it over. I had to come and try to find you. It’s you. I’ve never forgotten you. Never. I’m not going to be sent back like this.”

“It can be no good for either of us,” she said as resolute as he.

“I shan’t leave you.”

“But what is the good? . . .”

“I’m coming,” said Lewisham, dogmatically.

And he came.

He asked her a question point blank and she would not answer him, and for some way they walked in grim silence. Presently she spoke with a twitching mouth. “I wish you would leave me,” she said. “You are quite different from what I

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am. You felt that last night. You helped find us out. . . .”

“When first I came to London I used to wander about Clapham looking for you,” said Lewisham, “week after week.”

They had crossed the bridge and were in a narrow little street of shabby shops near Clapham Junction before they talked again. She kept her face averted and expressionless.

“I’m sorry,” said Lewisham, with a sort of stiff civility, “if I seem to be forcing myself upon you. I don’t want to pry into your affairs—if you don’t wish me to. The sight of you has somehow brought back a lot of things. . . . I can’t explain it. Perhaps—I had to come to find you—I kept on thinking of your face, of how you used to smile, how you jumped from the gate by the lock, and how we had tea . . . a lot of things.”

He stopped again.

“A lot of things.”

“If I may come,” he said, and went unanswered. They crossed the wide streets by the Junction and went on towards the Common.

“I live down this road,” she said stopping abruptly at a corner. “I would rather . . .”

“But I have said nothing.”

She looked at him with her face white, unable to speak for a space. “It can do no good,” she said. “I am mixed up with this. . . .”

She stopped.

He spoke deliberately. “I shall come,” he said, “to-morrow night.”

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"No," she said.

"But I shall come."

"No," she whispered.

"I shall come." She could hide the gladness of her heart from herself no longer. She was frightened that he had come, but she was glad and she knew he knew that she was glad. She made no further protest. She held out her hand dumbly. And on the morrow she found him awaiting her even as he had said.

CHAPTER XIV

MR. LAGUNE'S POINT OF VIEW

FOR three days the Laboratory at South Kensington saw nothing of Lagune, and then he came back more invincibly voluble than ever. Every one had expected him to return apostate, but he brought back an invigorated faith, a propaganda unashamed. From some source he had derived strength and conviction afresh. Even the rhetorical Smithers availed nothing. There was a joined battle over the insufficient tea-cups, and the elderly young assistant demonstrator hovered on the verge of the discussion, rejoicing, it is supposed, over the entanglements of Smithers. For at the outset Smithers displayed an overweening confidence and civility, and at the end his ears were red and his finer manners lost to him.

Lewisham, it was remarked by Miss Heydinger, made but a poor figure in this discussion. Once or twice he seemed about to address Lagune, and thought better of it with the words upon his lips.

Lagune's treatment of the exposure was light and vigorous. "The man Chaffery," he said, "has made a clean breast of it. His point of view——"

"Facts are facts," said Smithers.

"A fact is a synthesis of impressions," said Lagune; "but that you will learn when you are older. The thing is that we were at cross purposes. I

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told Chaffery you were beginners. He treated you as beginners—arranged a demonstration.”

“It *was* a demonstration,” said Smithers.

“Precisely. If it had not been for your interruptions . . .”

“Ah!”

“He forged elementary effects . . .”

“You can’t but admit that.”

“I don’t attempt to deny it. But, as he explained—the thing is necessary—justifiable. Psychic phenomena are subtle, a certain training of the observation is necessary. A medium is a more subtle instrument than a balance or a borax bead, and see how long it is before you can get assured results with a borax bead! In the elementary class, in the introductory phase, conditions are too crude. . . .”

“For honesty.”

“Wait a moment. *Is* it dishonest—rigging a demonstration?”

“Of course it is.”

“Your professors do it.”

“I deny that in toto,” said Smithers, and repeated with satisfaction, “in toto.”

“That’s all right,” said Lagune, “because I have the facts. Your chemical lecturers—you may go downstairs now and ask, if you disbelieve me—always cheat over the indestructibility of matter experiment—always. And then another—a physiography thing. You know the experiment I mean? To demonstrate the existence of the earth’s rotation. They use—they use——”

“Foucault’s pendulum,” said Lewisham. “They

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use a rubber ball with a pin-hole hidden in the hand, and blow the pendulum round the way it ought to go."

"But that's different," said Smithers.

"Wait a moment," said Lagune, and produced a piece of folded printed paper from his pocket. "Here is a review from *Nature* of the work of no less a person than Professor Greenhill. And see—a convenient pin is introduced into the apparatus for the demonstration of virtual velocities! Read it—if you doubt me. I suppose you doubt me."

Smithers abruptly abandoned his position of denial "in toto." "This isn't my point, Mr. Lagune; this isn't my point," he said. "These things that are done in the lecture theatre are not to prove facts, but to give ideas."

"So was my demonstration," said Lagune.

"We didn't understand it in that light."

"Nor does the ordinary person who goes to Science lectures understand it in that light. He is comforted by the thought that he is seeing things with his own eyes."

"Well, I don't care," said Smithers; "two wrongs don't make a right. To rig demonstrations is wrong."

"There I agree with you. I have spoken plainly with this man Chaffery. He's not a full-blown professor, you know, a highly salaried ornament of the rock of truth like your demonstration-rigging professors here, and so I can speak plainly to him without offence. He takes quite the view they would take. But I am more rigorous. I insist that there shall be no more of this. . . ."

"Next time—" said Smithers with irony.

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“There will be no next time. I have done with elementary exhibitions. You must take the word of the trained observer—just as you do in the matter of chemical analysis.”

“Do you mean you are going on with that chap when he’s been caught cheating under your very nose?”

“Certainly. Why not?”

Smithers set out to explain why not, and happened on confusion. “I still believe the man has powers,” said Lagune.

“Of deception,” said Smithers.

“Those I must eliminate,” said Lagune. “You might as well refuse to study electricity because it escaped through your body. All new science is elusive. No investigator in his senses would refuse to investigate a compound because it did unexpected things. Either this dissolves in acid or I have nothing more to do with it—eh? That’s fine research!”

Then it was the last vestiges of Smithers’s manners vanished. “I don’t care *what* you say,” said Smithers. “It’s all rot—it’s all just rot. Argue if you like—but have you convinced anybody? Put it to the vote?”

“That’s democracy with a vengeance,” said Lagune. “A general election of the truth half-yearly, eh?”

“That’s simply wriggling out of it,” said Smithers. “That hasn’t anything to do with it at all.”

Lagune, flushed but cheerful, was on his way downstairs when Lewisham overtook him. He was pale and out of breath, but as the staircase invariably

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rendered Lagune breathless he did not remark the younger man's disturbance. "Interesting talk," panted Lewisham. "Very interesting talk, sir."

"I'm glad you found it so—very," said Lagune.

There was a pause, and then Lewisham plunged desperately. "There is a young lady—she is your typist. . . ."

He stopped from sheer loss of breath.

"Yes?" said Lagune.

"Is she a medium or anything of that sort?"

"Well," Lagune reflected. "She is not a medium, certainly. But—why do you ask?"

"Oh! . . . I wondered."

"You noticed her eyes, perhaps. She is the step-daughter of that man Chaffery—a queer character but indisputably mediumistic. It's odd the thing should have struck you. Curiously enough I myself have fancied she might be something of a psychic—judging from her face."

"A what?"

"A psychic—undeveloped of course. I have thought once or twice. Only a little while ago I was speaking to that man Chaffery about her."

"Were you?"

"Yes. He of course would like to see any latent powers developed. But it's a little difficult to begin, you know."

"You mean—she won't?"

"Not at present. She is a good girl, but in this matter she is—timid. There is often a sort of disinclination—a queer sort of feeling—one might almost call it modesty."

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"I see," said Lewisham.

"One can override it usually. I don't despair."

"No," said Lewisham shortly. They were at the foot of the staircase now. He hesitated. "You've given me a lot to think about," he said with an attempt at an off-hand manner. "The way you talked upstairs"; and turned towards the book he had to sign.

"I'm glad you don't take up quite such an intolerant attitude as Mr. Smithers," said Lagune; "very glad. I must lend you a book or two. If your *cramming* here leaves you any time, that is."

"Thanks," said Lewisham shortly, and walked away from him. The studiously characteristic signature quivered and sprawled in an unfamiliar manner.

"I'm *damned* if he overrides it," said Lewisham, under his breath.

CHAPTER XV

LOVE IN THE STREETS

LEWISHAM was not quite clear what course he meant to take in the high enterprise of foiling Lagune, and indeed he was anything but clear about the entire situation. His logical processes, his emotions and his imagination seemed playing some sort of snatching game with his will. Enormous things hung imminent, but it worked out to this, that he walked home with Ethel night after night for—to be exact—seven and sixty nights. Every week night through November and December, save once when he had to go into the far East to buy himself an overcoat, he was waiting to walk with her home. A curious, inconclusive affair, that walk, to which he came nightly full of vague longings and which ended invariably under an odd shadow of disappointment. It began outside Lagune's most punctually at five, and ended—mysteriously—at the corner of a side road in Clapham, a road of little yellow houses with sunk basements and tawdry decorations of stone. Up that road she vanished night after night, into a grey mist and the shadow beyond a feeble yellow gas lamp, and he would watch her vanish, and then sigh and turn back towards his lodgings.

They talked of this and that, their little superficial ideas about themselves and of their circumstances and tastes, and always there was something, some-

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thing that was with them unspoken, unacknowledged, which made all these things unreal and insincere.

Yet out of their talk he began to form vague ideas of the home from which she came. There was, of course, no servant, and the mother was something meandering, furtive, tearful in the face of troubles. Sometimes of an afternoon or evening she grew garrulous. "Mother does talk so—sometimes." She rarely went out of doors. Chaffery always rose late, and would sometimes go away for days together. He was mean, he allowed only a weekly twenty-five shillings for housekeeping and sometimes things grew unsatisfactory at the week-end. There seemed to be little sympathy between mother and daughter; the widow had been flighty in a dingy fashion, and her marriage with her chief lodger Chaffery had led to unforgettable sayings. It was to facilitate this marriage that Ethel had been sent to Whortley, so that was counted a mitigated evil. But these were far-off things, remote and unreal down the long, ill-lit vista of the suburban street which swallowed up Ethel nightly. The walk, her warmth and light and motion close to him, her clear little voice and the touch of her hand; that was reality.

The shadow of Chaffery and his deceptions lay indeed across all these things, sometimes faint, sometimes dark and present. Then Lewisham became insistent, his sentimental memories ceased, and he asked questions that verged on gulfs of doubt. Had she ever "helped?" She had not, she declared. Then she added that twice at home she had "sat down" to complete the circle. She would never

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help again. That she promised—if it needed promising. There had already been dreadful trouble at home about the exposure at Lagune's. Her mother had sided with her stepfather and joined in blaming her. But was she to blame?

“Of course you were not to blame,” said Lewisham.

Lagune, he learned, had been unhappy and restless for the three days after the *séance*—indulging in wearisome monologue—with Ethel as sole auditor (at twenty-one shillings a week). Then he had decided to give Chaffery a sound lecture on his disastrous dishonesty. But it was Chaffery gave the lecture. Smithers, had he only known it, had been overthrown by a better brain than Lagune's, albeit it spoke through Lagune's treble.

Ethel did not like talking of Chaffery and these other things. “If you knew how sweet it was to forget it all,” she would say; “to be just us two together for a little while.” And, “What good *does* it do to keep on?” when Lewisham was pressing. Lewisham wanted very much to keep on at times, but the good of it was a little hard to demonstrate. So his knowledge of the situation remained imperfect and the weeks drifted by.

Wonderfully varied were those seven and sixty nights, as he came to remember in after life. There were nights of damp and drizzle, and then thick fogs, beautiful, isolating, grey-white veils, turning every yard of pavement into a private room. Grand indeed were these fogs, things to rejoice at mightily, since then it was no longer a thing for public scorn that

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two young people hurried along arm in arm, and one could do a thousand impudent, significant things with varying pressure and the fondling of a little hand (a hand in a greatly mended glove of cheap kid). Then indeed one seemed to be nearer that elusive something that threaded it all together. And the dangers of the street corners, the horses looming up suddenly out of the dark, the carters with lanterns at their horses' heads, the street lamps, blurred smoky orange at one's nearest, and vanishing at twenty yards into dim haze, seemed to accentuate the infinite need of protection on the part of a delicate young lady who had already traversed three winters of fogs, thornily alone. Moreover, one could come right down the quiet street where she lived, half-way to the steps of her house, with a delightful sense of enterprise.

The fogs passed all too soon into a hard frost, into nights of starlight and presently moonlight, when the lamps looked hard, flashing like rows of yellow gems, and their reflections and the glare of the shop windows were sharp and frosty and even the stars hard and bright, snapping noiselessly (if one may say so) instead of twinkling. A jacket trimmed with imitation Astrakhan replaced Ethel's lighter coat, and a round cap of Astrakhan her hat, and her eyes shone hard and bright, and her forehead was broad and white beneath it. It was exhilarating, but one got home too soon; and so the way from Chelsea to Clapham was lengthened, first into a loop of side streets, and then when the first pulverulent snows told that Christmas was at hand, into a new loop down King's Road, and once even

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through the Brompton Road and Sloane Street, where the shops were full of decorations and entertaining things.

And under circumstances of infinite gravity, Mr. Lewisham secretly spent three-and-twenty shillings out of the vestiges of that hundred pounds, and bought Ethel a little gold ring set with pearls. With that there must needs be a ceremonial, and on the verge of the snowy, foggy Common she took off her glove and the ring was placed on her finger. Whereupon he was moved to kiss her—on the frost-pink knuckle next to an inky nail.

“It’s silly of us,” she said. “What can we do?—ever?”

“You wait,” he said, and his tone was full of vague promises.

Afterwards he thought over those promises, and another evening went into the matter more fully, telling her of all the brilliant things that he held it was possible for a South Kensington student to do and be—of head-masterships, northern science schools, inspectorships, demonstratorships, yea, even professorships. And then, and then— To all of which she lent a willing and incredulous ear, finding in that dreaming a quality of fear as well as delight.

The putting on of the pearl-set ring was mere ceremonial, of course; she could not wear it either at Lagune’s or at home, so instead she threaded it on a little white satin ribbon and wore it round her neck—“next her heart.” He thought of it there warm “next her heart.”

When he had bought the ring he had meant to

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save it for Christmas before he gave it to her. But the desire to see her pleasure had been too strong for him.

Christmas Eve, I know not by what deceit on her part, these young people spent together all day. Lagune was down with a touch of bronchitis and had given his typist a holiday. Perhaps she forgot to mention it at home. The Royal College was in vacation and Lewisham was free. He declined the plumber's invitation; "work" kept him in London, he said, though it meant a pound or more of added expenditure. These absurd young people walked sixteen miles that Christmas Eve, and parted warm and glowing. There had been a hard frost and a little snow, the sky was a colourless grey, icicles hung from the arms of the street lamps, and the pavements were patterned out with frond-like forms that were trodden into slides as the day grew older. The Thames they knew was a wonderful sight, but that they kept until last. They went first along the Brompton Road. . . .

And it is well that you should have the picture of them right; Lewisham in the ready-made overcoat, blue cloth and velvet collar, dirty tan gloves, red tie, and bowler hat; Ethel in a two-year-old jacket, and hat of curly Astrakhan; both pink-cheeked from the keen air, shyly arm in arm occasionally, and very alert to miss no possible spectacle. The shops were varied and interesting along the Brompton Road, but nothing to compare with Piccadilly. There were windows in Piccadilly so full of costly little things it took fifteen minutes to get them done, card shops,

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drapers' shops full of foolish, entertaining attractions. Lewisham, in spite of his old animosities, forgot to be severe on the Shopping Class, Ethel was so vastly entertained by all these pretty follies.

Then up Regent Street by the place where the sham diamonds are, and the place where the girls display their long hair, and the place where the little chickens run about in the window, and so into Oxford Street, Holborn, through to Ludgate Hill, St. Paul's Churchyard, and on to Leadenhall and the markets where turkeys, geese, ducklings and chickens—turkeys predominant, however—hang in rows by the thousand.

"I *must* buy you something," said Lewisham, resuming a topic.

"No, no," said Ethel with her eye down a vista of innumerable birds.

"But I *must*," said Lewisham. "You had better choose it, or I shall get something wrong." His mind ran on brooches and clasps.

"You mustn't waste your money, and besides, I have that ring."

But Lewisham insisted.

"Then—if you must—I am starving. Buy me something to eat."

An immense and memorable joke. Lewisham plunged recklessly—orientally—into an awe-inspiring place with mitred napkins. They lunched on cutlets—stripped the cutlets to the bone—and little crisp brown potatoes, and they drank between them a whole half bottle of—some white wine or other, selected by Lewisham in an off-hand way from the

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list. Neither of them had ever taken wine at a meal before. One-and-ninepence it cost him, Sir, and the name of it was Capri! It was really very passable Capri—a manufactured product, no doubt, but warming and aromatic. Ethel was aghast at his magnificence and drank a glass and a half.

Then, very warm and comfortable, they went down by the Tower, and the Tower Bridge with its crest of snow, huge pendant icicles, and the ice blocks choked in its side arches, was seasonable seeing. And as they had had enough of shops and crowds they set off resolutely along the desolate Embankment homeward.

But indeed the Thames was a wonderful sight that year! Ice-fringed along either shore, and with drift-ice in the middle reflecting a luminous scarlet from the broad red setting sun, and moving steadily, incessantly seaward. A swarm of mewing gulls went to and fro, and with them mingled pigeons and crows. The buildings on the Surrey side were dim and grey and very mysterious, the moored, ice-blocked barges silent and deserted, and here and there a lit window shone warm. The sun sank right out of sight into a bank of blue, and the Surrey side dissolved in mist save for a few insoluble spots of yellow light that presently became many. And after our lovers had come under Charing Cross Bridge the Houses of Parliament rose before them at the end of a great crescent of golden lamps, blue and faint, half-way between the earth and sky. And the clock on the Tower was like a November sun.

It was a day without a flaw, or at most but the

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slightest speck. And that only came at the very end.

“Good-bye, dear,” she said. “I have been very happy to-day.”

His face came very close to hers. “Good-bye,” he said, pressing her hand and looking into her eyes.

She glanced round, she drew nearer to him. “*Dearest* one,” she whispered very softly, and then, “Good-bye.”

Suddenly he became unaccountably petulant, he dropped her hand. “It’s always like this. We are happy. *I* am happy. And then—then you are taken away. . . .”

There was a silence of mute interrogations.

“Dear,” she whispered, “we must wait.”

A moment’s pause. “*Wait!*” he said, and broke off. He hesitated. “Good-bye,” he said as though he was snapping a thread that held them together.

CHAPTER XVI

MISS HEYDINGER'S PRIVATE THOUGHTS

THE way from Chelsea to Clapham and the way from South Kensington to Battersea, especially if the former is looped about a little to make it longer, come very near to each other. One night close upon Christmas two friends of Lewisham's passed him and Ethel. But Lewisham did not see them, because he was looking at Ethel's face.

"Did you see?" said the other girl, a little maliciously.

"Mr. Lewisham—wasn't it?" said Miss Heydinger in a perfectly indifferent tone.

Miss Heydinger sat in the room her younger sister called her "Sanctum." Her Sanctum was only too evidently an intellectualised bedroom, and a cheap wall-paper of silvery roses peeped coquettishly from between her draped furniture. Her particular glories were the writing-desk in the middle of the room and the microscope on the unsteady octagonal table under the window. There were bookshelves of workmanship patently feminine in their facile decoration and structural instability, and on them an array of glittering poets, Shelley, Rossetti, Keats, Browning, and odd volumes of Ruskin, South Place Sermons, Socialistic publications in torn paper covers, and above, science textbooks and notebooks in an

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oppressive abundance. The autotypes that hung about the room were eloquent of æsthetic ambitions and of a certain impermeability to implicit meanings. There was the *Mirror of Venus* by Burne-Jones, Rossetti's *Annunciation*, Lippi's *Annunciation*, and the *Love and Life and Love and Death of Watts*. And among other photographs was one of last year's Debating Society Committee, Lewisham smiling a little weakly near the centre, and Miss Heydinger out of focus in the right wing. And Miss Heydinger sat with her back to all these things in her black horsehair arm-chair, staring into the fire, her eyes hot and her chin on her hand.

"I might have guessed—before," she said. "Ever since that *séance*. It has been different . . ."

She smiled bitterly. "Some shop girl . . ."

She mused. "They are all alike, I suppose. They come back—a little damaged, as the woman says in 'Lady Windermere's Fan.' Perhaps he will. I wonder . . ."

"Why should he be so deceitful? Why should he act to me? . . ."

"Pretty, pretty, pretty—that is our business. What man hesitates in the choice? He goes his own way, thinks his own thoughts, does his own work. . . ."

"His dissection is getting behind—one can see he takes scarcely any notes. . . ."

For a long time she was silent. Her face became more intent. She began to bite her thumb, at first slowly, then faster. She broke out at last into words again.

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“The things he might do, the great things he might do. He is able, he is dogged, he is strong. And then comes a pretty face! Oh God! *Why* was I made with heart and brain?” She sprang to her feet, with her hands clenched and her face contorted. But she shed no tears.

Her attitude fell limp in a moment. One hand dropped by her side, the other rested on a fossil on the mantel-shelf, and she stared down into the red fire.

“To think of all we might have done! It maddens me!

“To work, and think, and learn. To hope and wait. To despise the petty arts of womanliness, to trust to the sanity of man . . .

“To awake like the foolish virgins,” she said, “and find the hour of life is past!”

Her face, her pose, softened into self-pity.

“Futility . . .

“It’s no good. . . .” Her voice broke.

“I shall never be happy. . . .”

She saw the grandiose vision of the future she had cherished, suddenly rolled aside and vanishing, more and more splendid as it grew more and more remote—like a dream at the waking moment. The vision of her inevitable loneliness came to replace it, clear and acute. She saw herself alone and small in a huge desolation—infinately pitiful, Lewisham callously receding. With “some shop girl.” The tears came, came faster, until they were streaming down her face. She turned as if looking for something. She flung herself upon her knees before the

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little arm-chair, and began an incoherent sobbing prayer for the pity and comfort of God.

The next day one of the other girls in the biological course remarked to her friend that "Heydinger-dingery" had relapsed. Her friend glanced down the laboratory. "It's a bad relapse," she said. "Really . . . I couldn't . . . wear my hair like that."

She continued to regard Miss Heydinger with a critical eye. She was free to do this because Miss Heydinger was standing, lost in thought, staring at the December fog outside the laboratory windows. "She looks white," said the girl who had originally spoken. "I wonder if she works hard."

"It makes precious little difference if she does," said her friend. "I asked her yesterday what were the bones in the parietal segment, and she didn't know one. Not one."

The next day Miss Heydinger's place was vacant. She was ill—from overstudy—and her illness lasted to within three weeks of the terminal examination. Then she came back with a pallid face and a strenuous unavailing industry.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE RAPHAEL GALLERY

It was nearly three o'clock, and in the Biological Laboratory the lamps were all alight. The class was busy with razors cutting sections of the root of a fern to examine it microscopically. A certain silent frog-like boy, a private student who plays no further part in this story, was working intently, looking more like a frog than usual,—his expression modest with a touch of effort. Behind Miss Heydinger, jaded and untidy in her early manner again, was a vacant seat, an abandoned microscope and scattered pencils and notebooks.

On the door of the class-room was a list of those who had passed the Christmas examination. At the head of it was the name of the aforesaid frog-like boy; next to him came Smithers and one of the girls bracketed together. Lewisham ingloriously headed the second class, and Miss Heydinger's name did not appear—there was, the list asserted, "one failure." So the student pays for the finer emotions.

And in the spacious solitude of the museum gallery devoted to the Raphael cartoons, sat Lewisham, plunged in gloomy meditation. A negligent hand pulled thoughtfully at the indisputable moustache, with particular attention to such portions as were long enough to gnaw.

He was trying to see the situation clearly. The

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shadow of that defeat lay across everything, blotted out the light of his pride, shaded his honour, threw everything into a new perspective. The rich prettiness of his love-making had fled to some remote quarter of his being. Against the frog-like youngster he felt a savage animosity. And Smithers had betrayed him. He was angry, bitterly angry with "swats" and "muggers" who spent their whole time grinding for these foolish chancy examinations. Nor had the practical examination been altogether fair, and one of the questions in the written portion was quite outside the lectures. Biver, Professor Biver, was an indiscriminating ass, he felt assured, and so too was Weeks, the demonstrator. But these obstacles could not blind his intelligence to the manifest cause of his overthrow, the waste of more than half his available evening, the best time for study in the twenty-four hours, day after day. And that was going on steadily, a perpetual leakage of time. To-night he would go to meet her again, and begin to accumulate to himself ignominy in the second part of the course, the botanical section, also. And so, reluctantly rejecting one cloudy excuse after another, he clearly focussed the antagonism between his relations to Ethel and his immediate ambitions.

Things had come so easily to him for the last two years that he had taken his steady upward progress in life as assured. It had never occurred to him, when he went to intercept Ethel after that *séance*, that he went into any peril of that sort. Now he had had a sharp reminder. He began to shape a

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picture of the frog-like boy at home—he was a private student of the upper middle class—sitting in a convenient study with a writing-table, bookshelves and a shaded lamp—Lewisham worked at his chest of drawers with his great-coat on, and his feet in the lowest drawer wrapped in all his available linen—and in the midst of incredible conveniences the frog-like boy was working, working, working. Meanwhile Lewisham toiled through the foggy streets, Chelsea-ward, or, after he had left her, tramped homeward—full of foolish imaginings.

He began to think with bloodless lucidity of his entire relationship to Ethel. His softer emotions were in abeyance, but he told himself no lies. He cared for her, he loved to be with her and to talk to her and please her, but that was not all his desire. He thought of the bitter words of an orator at Hammersmith, who had complained that in our present civilisation even the elemental need of marriage was denied. Virtue had become a vice. "We marry in fear and trembling, sex for a home is the woman's traffic, and the man comes to his heart's desire when his heart's desire is dead." The thing which had seemed a mere flourish, came back now with a terrible air of truth. Lewisham saw that it was a case of divergent ways. On the one hand that shining staircase to fame and power that had been his dream from the very dawn of his adolescence, and on the other hand—Ethel.

And if he chose Ethel, even then would he have his choice? What would come of it? A few walks more or less! She was hopelessly poor, he was

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hopelessly poor, and this cheat of a Medium was her stepfather! After all she was not well-educated, she did not understand his work and his aims. . . .

He suddenly perceived with absolute conviction that after the *séance* he should have gone home and forgotten her. Why had he felt that irresistible impulse to seek her out? Why had his imagination spun such a strange web of possibilities about her? He was involved now, foolishly involved. . . . All his future was a sacrifice to this transitory ghost of love-making in the streets. He pulled spitefully at his moustache.

His picture began to shape itself into Ethel and her mysterious mother and the vague dexterous Chaffery holding him back, entangled in an impalpable net, from that bright and glorious ascent to performance and distinction. Leaky boots and the splashings of cabs as his portion for all his life! Already the Forbes Medal, the immediate step, was as good as lost. . . .

What on earth had he been thinking about? He fell foul of his upbringing. Men of the upper or middle classes were put up to these things by their parents; they were properly warned against involving themselves in this love nonsense before they were independent. It was much better. . . .

Everything was going. Not only his work—his scientific career, but the Debating Society, the political movement, all his work for Humanity. . . . Why not be resolute—even now? . . . Why not put the thing clearly and plainly to her? Or write? If he wrote now he could get the advantage of the

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evening at the Library. He must ask her to forego these walks home—at least until the next examination. *She* would understand. He had a qualm of doubt whether she would understand. . . . He grew angry at this possibility. But it was no good mincing matters. If once he began to consider her— Why should he consider her in that way? Simply because she was unreasonable!

Lewisham had a transitory gust of anger.

Yet that abandonment of the walks insisted on looking mean to him. And she would think it mean. Which was very much worse, somehow. *Why* mean? Why should she think it mean? He grew angry again.

The portly museum policeman who had been watching him furtively, wondering why a student should sit in front of the Sacrifice of Lystra and gnaw lips and nails and moustache, and scowl and glare at that masterpiece, saw him rise suddenly to his feet with an air of resolution, spin on his heel, and set off with a quick step out of the gallery. He looked neither to the right nor the left. He passed out of sight down the staircase.

“Gone to get some more moustache to eat, I suppose,” said the policeman reflectively. . . .

“One ’ud think something had bit him.”

After some pensive moments the policeman strolled along down the gallery and came to a stop opposite the cartoon.

“Figgers is a bit big for the houses,” said the policeman, anxious to do impartial justice. “But that’s Art. I lay ’e couldn’t do anything . . . not arf so good.”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FRIENDS OF PROGRESS MEET

THE night next but one after this meditation saw a new order in the world. A young lady dressed in an Astrakhan-edged jacket and with a face of diminished cheerfulness marched from Chelsea to Clapham alone, and Lewisham sat in the flickering electric light of the Education Library, staring blankly over a business-like pile of books at unseen things.

The arrangement had not been effected without friction, the explanation had proved difficult. Evidently she did not appreciate the full seriousness of Lewisham's mediocre position in the list. "But you have *passed* all right," she said. Neither could she grasp the importance of evening study. "Of course I don't know," she said judicially; "but I thought you were learning all day." She calculated the time consumed by their walk as half an hour, "just one half hour," she forgot that he had to get to Chelsea and then to return to his lodgings. Her customary tenderness was veiled by an only too apparent resentment. First at him, and then when he protested, at Fate. "I suppose it *has* to be," she said. "Of course it doesn't matter, I suppose, if we *don't* see each other quite so often," with a quiver of pale lips.

He had returned from the parting with an uneasy

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mind, and that evening had gone in the composition of a letter that was to make things clearer. But his scientific studies rendered his prose style hard, and things he could whisper he could not write. His justification indeed did him no sort of justice. But her reception of it made her seem a very unreasonable person. He had some violent fluctuations. At times he was bitterly angry with her for her failure to see things as he did. He would wander about the museum conducting imaginary discussions with her and even making scathing remarks. At other times he had to summon all his powers of acrid discipline and all his memories of her resentful retorts, to keep himself from a headlong rush to Chelsea and unmanly capitulation.

And this new disposition of things endured for two weeks. It did not take Miss Heydinger all that time to discover that the disaster of the examination had wrought a change in Lewisham. She perceived those nightly walks were over. It was speedily evident to her that he was working with a kind of dogged fury; he came early, he went late. The wholesome freshness of his cheek paled. He was to be seen on each of the late nights amidst a pile of diagrams and textbooks in one of the less draughty corners of the Education Library, accumulating piles of memoranda. And nightly in the Students' "club" he wrote a letter addressed to a stationer's shop in Clapham, but that she did not see. For the most part these letters were brief, for Lewisham, South Kensington fashion, prided himself upon not being "literary," and some of the more despatch-like

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wounded a heart perhaps too hungry for tender words.

He did not meet Miss Heydinger's renewed advances with invariable kindness. Yet something of the old relations were presently restored. He would talk well to her for a time, and then snap like a dry twig. But the loaning of books was resumed, the subtle process of his æsthetic education that Miss Heydinger had devised. "Here is a book I promised you," she said one day, and he tried to remember the promise.

The book was a collection of Browning's Poems, and it contained "Sludge"; it also happened that it contained "The Statue and the Bust"—that stimulating lecture on half-hearted constraints. "Sludge" did not interest Lewisham, it was not at all his idea of a medium, but he read and re-read "The Statue and the Bust." It had the profoundest effect upon him. He went to sleep—he used to read his literature in bed because it was warmer there, and over literature nowadays it did not matter as it did with science if one dozed a little—with these lines stimulating his emotions:—

"So weeks grew months, years; gleam by gleam
The glory dropped from their youth and love,
And both perceived they had dreamed a dream."

By way of fruit it may be to such seed, he dreamed a dream that night. It concerned Ethel, and at last they were a-marrying. He drew her to his arms. He bent to kiss her. And suddenly he saw her lips were shrivelled and her eyes were dull, saw the

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wrinkles seaming her face! She was old! She was intolerably old! He woke in a kind of horror and lay awake and very dismal until dawn, thinking of their separation and of her solitary walk through the muddy streets, thinking of his position, the leeway he had lost and the chances there were against him in the battle of the world. He perceived the colourless truth; the Career was improbable, and that Ethel should be added to it was almost hopeless. Clearly the question was between these two. Or should he vacillate and lose both? And then his wretchedness gave place to that anger that comes of perpetually thwarted desires. . . .

It was on the day after this dream that he insulted Parkson so grossly. He insulted Parkson after a meeting of the "Friends of Progress" at Parkson's rooms.

No type of English student nowadays quite realises the noble ideal of plain living and high thinking. Our admirable examination system admits of extremely little thinking at any level, high or low. But the Kensington student's living is at any rate insufficient, and he makes occasional signs of recognition towards the cosmic process.

One such sign was the periodic gathering of these "Friends of Progress," an association begotten of Lewisham's paper on Socialism. It was understood that strenuous things were to be done to make the world better, but so far no decisive action had been taken.

They met in Parkson's sitting-room, because Parkson, being a Whitworth Scholar and in receipt of one hundred pounds a year, was the only one of

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the Friends opulent enough to have a sitting-room. The Friends were of various ages, mostly very young. Several smoked and others held pipes which they had discontinued smoking—but there was nothing to drink except coffee, because that was the utmost they could afford. Dunkerley, an assistant master in a suburban school, and Lewisham's former colleague at Whortley, attended these assemblies through the introduction of Lewisham. All the Friends wore red ties except Bletherley, who wore an orange one to show that he was aware of Art, and Dunkerley wore a black one with blue specks because assistant masters in small private schools have to keep up appearances. And their simple procedure was that each talked as much as the others would suffer.

Usually the self-proposed "Luther of Socialism"—ridiculous Lewisham!—had a thesis or so to maintain, but this night he was depressed and inattentive. He sat with his legs over the arm of his chair by way of indicating the state of his mind. He had a packet of Algerian cigarettes (twenty for five pence) and appeared chiefly concerned to smoke them all before the evening was out. Bletherley was going to discourse of "Woman under Socialism," and he brought a big American edition of Shelley's works and a volume of Tennyson, including the "Princess," both bristling with paper tongues against his marked quotations. He was all for the abolition of "monopolies," and the *crèche* was to replace the family. He was unctuous when he was not pretty-pretty, and his views were evidently unpopular.

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Parkson was a man from Lancashire, and a devout Quaker; his third and completing factor was Ruskin, with whose work and phraseology he was saturated. He listened to Bletherley with a marked disapproval, and opened a vigorous defence of that ancient tradition of loyalty that Bletherley had called the monopolist institution of marriage. "The pure and simple old theory—love and faithfulness," said Parkson, "suffices for me. If we are to smear our political movements with this sort of stuff . . ."

"Does it work?" interjected Lewisham, speaking for the first time.

"What work?"

"The pure and simple old theory. I know the theory. I believe in the theory. Bletherley's Shelley-witted. But it's theory. You meet the inevitable girl. The theory says you may meet her anywhen. You meet too young. You fall in love. You marry—in spite of obstacles. Love laughs at locksmiths. You have children. That's the theory. All very well for a man whose father can leave him five hundred a year. But how does it work for a shopman? . . . An assistant master like Dunkerley? Or . . . Me?"

"In these cases one must exercise restraint," said Parkson. "Have faith. A man that is worth having is worth waiting for."

"Worth growing old for?" said Lewisham.

"Chap ought to fight," said Dunkerley. "Don't see your difficulty, Lewisham. Struggle for existence keen, no doubt, tremendous in fact—still. In it—may as well struggle. Two—join forces—pool the luck. If I saw a girl I fancied so that I wanted

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to, I'd marry her to-morrow. And my market value is seventy *non res*."

Lewisham looked round at him eagerly, suddenly interested. "Would you?" he said. Dunkerley's face was slightly flushed.

"Like a shot. Why not?"

"But how are you to live?"

"That comes after. If . . ."

"I can't agree with you, Mr. Dunkerley," said Parkson. "I don't know if you have read 'Sesame and Lilies,' but there you have, set forth far more fairly than any words of mine could do, an ideal of a woman's place . . ."

"All rot—'Sesame and Lilies,'" interrupted Dunkerley. "Read bits. Couldn't stand it. Never *can* stand Ruskin. Too many prepositions. Tremendous English, no doubt, but not my style. Sort of thing a wholesale grocer's daughter might read to get refined. *We* can't afford to get refined."

"But would you really marry a girl . . . ?" began Lewisham, with an unprecedented admiration for Dunkerley in his eyes.

"Why not?"

"On—?" Lewisham hesitated.

"Forty pounds a year *res*. Whack! Yes."

A silent youngster began to speak, cleared an accumulated huskiness from his throat and said, "Consider the girl."

"Why *marry*?" asked Bletherley, unregarded.

"You must admit you are asking a great thing when you want a girl . . ."

"Not so. When a girl's chosen a man, and he

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chooses her, her place is with him. What is the good of hankering? Mutual. Fight together."

"Good!" said Lewisham suddenly emotional. "You talk like a man, Dunkerley. I'm hanged if you don't."

"The place of Woman," insisted Parkson, "is the Home. And if there is no home—! I hold that, if need be, a man should toil seven years—as Jacob did for Rachel—ruling his passions, to make the home fitting and sweet for her . . ."

"Get the hutch for the pet animal," said Dunkerley. "No. I mean to marry a *woman*. Female sex always *has* been in the struggle for existence—no great damage so far—always will be. Tremendous idea—that struggle for existence. Only sensible theory you've got hold of, Lewisham. Woman who isn't fighting square side by side with a man—woman who's just kept and fed and petted is . . ." He hesitated.

A lad with a spotted face and a bulldog pipe between his teeth supplied a Biblical word.

"That's shag," said Dunkerley. "I was going to say 'a harem of one.'"

The youngster was puzzled for a moment. "I smoke Perique," he said.

"It will make you just as sick," said Dunkerley.

"Refinement's so beastly vulgar," was the belated answer of the smoker of Perique.

That was the interesting part of the evening to Lewisham. Parkson suddenly rose, got down "Sesame and Lilies," and insisted upon reading a lengthy mellifluous extract that went like a garden roller

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over the debate, and afterwards Bletherley became the centre of a wrangle that left him grossly insulted and in a minority of one. The institution of marriage, so far as the South Kensington student is concerned, is in no immediate danger.

Parkson turned out with the rest of them at half-past ten, for a walk. The night was warm for February and the waxing moon bright. Parkson fixed himself upon Lewisham and Dunkerley, to Lewisham's intense annoyance—for he had a few intimate things he could have said to the man of Ideas that night. Dunkerley lived north, so that the three went up Exhibition Road to High Street, Kensington. There they parted from Dunkerley, and Lewisham and Parkson turned southward again for Lewisham's new lodging in Chelsea.

Parkson was one of those exponents of virtue for whom the discussion of sexual matters has an irresistible attraction. The meeting had left him eloquent. He had argued with Dunkerley to the verge of indelicacy, and now he poured out a vast and increasingly confidential flow of talk upon Lewisham. Lewisham was distraught. He walked as fast as he could. His sole object was to get rid of Parkson. Parkson's sole object was to tell him interesting secrets about himself and a Certain Person with a mind of extraordinary Purity of whom Lewisham had heard before.

Ages passed.

Lewisham suddenly found himself being shown a photograph under a lamp. It represented an asymmetrical face singularly void of expression, the

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upper part of an "art" dress, and a fringe of curls. He perceived he was being given to understand that this was a Paragon of Purity, and that she was the particular property of Parkson. Parkson was regarding him proudly and apparently awaiting his verdict.

Lewisham struggled with the truth. "It's an interesting face," he said.

"It is a face essentially beautiful," said Parkson quietly but firmly. "Do you notice the eyes, Lewisham?"

"Oh, yes," said Lewisham. "Yes. I see the eyes."

"They are . . . innocent. They are the eyes of a little child."

"Yes. They look that sort of eye. Very nice, old man. I congratulate you. Where does she live?"

"You never saw a face like that in London," said Parkson.

"*Never,*" said Lewisham decisively.

"I would not show that to every one," said Parkson. "You can scarcely judge all that pure-hearted, wonderful girl is to me." He returned the photograph solemnly to its envelope, regarding Lewisham with an air of one who has performed the ceremony of blood-brotherhood. Then taking Lewisham's arm affectionately—a thing Lewisham detested—he went on to a copious outpouring on Love—with illustrative anecdotes of the Paragon. It was just sufficiently cognate to the matter of Lewisham's thoughts to demand attention. Every now and then he had to answer, and he felt an idiotic desire—albeit he clearly perceived its idiocy—to reciprocate confidences. The necessity of fleeing Parkson

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became urgent—Lewisham's temper under these multitudinous stresses was going.

"Every man needs a Lode Star," said Parkson—and Lewisham swore under his breath.

Parkson's lodgings were now near at hand to the left, and it occurred to him this boredom would be soonest ended if he took Parkson home. Parkson consented mechanically, still discoursing.

"I have often seen you talking to Miss Heydinger," he said. "If you will pardon my saying it . . ."

"We are excellent friends," admitted Lewisham. "But here we are at your diggings."

Parkson stared at his "diggings." "There's Heaps I want to talk about. I'll come part of the way at any rate to Battersea. Your Miss Heydinger, I was saying . . ."

From that point onwards he made casual appeals to a supposed confidence between Lewisham and Miss Heydinger, each of which increased Lewisham's exasperation. "It will not be long before you also, Lewisham, will begin to know the infinite purification of a Pure Love. . . ." Then suddenly, with a vague idea of suppressing Parkson's unendurable chatter, as one motive at least, Lewisham rushed into the confidential.

"I know," he said. "You talk to me as though . . . I've marked out my destiny these three years." His confidential impulse died as he relieved it.

"You don't mean to say Miss Heydinger—?" asked Parkson.

"Oh, *damn* Miss Heydinger!" said Lewisham,

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and suddenly, abruptly, uncivilly, he turned away from Parkson at the end of the street and began walking away southward, leaving Parkson in mid-sentence at the crossing.

Parkson stared in astonishment at his receding back, and ran after him to ask for the grounds of this sudden offence. Lewisham walked on for a space with Parkson trotting by his side. Then suddenly he turned. His face was quite white and he spoke in a tired voice.

“Parkson,” he said, “you are a fool! . . . You have the face of a sheep, the manners of a buffalo, and the conversation of a bore. Pewrity indeed! . . . The girl whose photograph you showed me has eyes that don’t match. She looks as loathsome as one would naturally expect. . . . I’m not joking now. . . . Go away!”

After that Lewisham went on his southward way alone. He did not go straight to his room in Chelsea, but spent some hours in a street in Battersea, pacing to and fro in front of a possible house. His passion changed from savagery to a tender longing. If only he could see her to-night! He knew his own mind now. To-morrow he was resolved he would fling work to the dogs and meet her. The things Dunkerley had said had filled his mind with wonderful novel thoughts. If only he could see her now!

His wish was granted. At the corner of the street two figures passed him: one of these, a tall man in glasses and a quasi-clerical hat, with coat collar turned up under his grey side-whiskers, he recognised as Chaffery; the other he knew only too well. The

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pair passed him without seeing him, but for an instant the lamplight fell upon her face and showed it white and tired.

Lewisham stopped dead at the corner, staring in blank astonishment after these two figures as they receded into the haze under the lights. He was dumfounded. A clock struck slowly. It was midnight. Presently down the road came the slamming of their door.

Long after the echo died away he stood there. "She has been at a *séance*; she has broken her promise. She has been at a *séance*, she has broken her promise," sang in perpetual reiteration through his brain.

And then came the interpretation. "She has done it because I have left her. I might have told it from her letters. She has done it because she thinks I am not in earnest, that my love-making was just boyishness. . . .

"I knew she would never understand."

CHAPTER XIX

LEWISHAM'S SOLUTION

THE next morning Lewisham learned from Lagune that his intuition was correct, that Ethel had at last succumbed to pressure and consented to attempt thought-reading. "We made a good beginning," said Lagune rubbing his hands. "I am sure we shall do well with her. Certainly she has powers. I have always felt it in her face. She has powers."

"Was much . . . pressure necessary?" asked Lewisham by an effort.

"We had—considerable difficulty. Considerable. But of course—as I pointed out to her—it was scarcely possible for her to continue as my typist unless she was disposed to take an interest in my investigations——"

"You did that?"

"Had to. Fortunately Chaffery—it was his idea. I must admit——"

Lagune stopped astonished. Lewisham, after making an odd sort of movement with his hands, had turned round and was walking away down the laboratory. Lagune stared, confronted by a psychic phenomenon beyond his circle of ideas. "Odd!" he said at last, and began to unpack his bag. Ever and again he stopped and stared at Lewisham, who was now sitting in his own place and drumming on the table with both hands.

Presently Miss Heydinger came out of the speci-

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men room and addressed a remark to the young man. He appeared to answer with considerable brevity. He then stood up, hesitated for a moment between the three doors of the laboratory, and walked out by that opening on the back staircase. Lagune did not see him again until the afternoon.

That night Ethel had Lewisham's company again on her way home and their voices were earnest. She did not go straight home, but instead they went up under the gas lamps to the vague spaces of Clapham Common to talk there at length. And the talk that night was a momentous one. "Why have you broken your promise?" he said.

Her excuses were vague and weak. "I thought you did not care so much as you did," she said. "And when you stopped these walks—nothing seemed to matter. Besides—it is not like *séances* with spirits . . ."

At first Lewisham was passionate and forcible. His anger at Lagune and Chaffery blinded him to her turpitude. He talked her defences down. "It is cheating," he said. "Well—even if what *you* do is not cheating, it is delusion—unconscious cheating. Even if there is something in it, it is wrong. True or not, it is wrong. Why don't they thought-read each other? Why should they want you? Your mind is your own. It is sacred. To probe it!—I won't have it! I won't have it! At least you are mine to that extent. I can't think of you like that—bandaged. And that little fool pressing his hand on the back of your neck and asking questions. I won't have it! I would rather kill you than that."

"They don't do that!"

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“I don't care! that is what it will come to. The bandage is the beginning. People must not get their living in that way anyhow. I've thought it out. Let them thought-read their daughters and hypnotise their aunts, and leave their typists alone.”

“But what am I to do?”

“That's not it. There are things one must not suffer anyhow, whatever happens! Or else—one might be made to do anything. Honour! Just because we are poor— Let him dismiss you! *Let* him dismiss you. You can get another place——”

“Not at a guinea a week.”

“Then take less.”

“But I have to pay sixteen shillings every week.”

“That doesn't matter.”

She caught at a sob. “But to leave London—I can't do it. I can't.”

“But how?— Leave London?” Lewisham's face changed.

“Oh! life is *hard*,” she said. “I can't. They—they wouldn't let me stop in London.”

“What do you mean?”

She explained if Lagune dismissed her she was to go into the country to an aunt, a sister of Chaffery's who needed a companion. Chaffery insisted upon that. “Companion they call it. I shall be just a servant—she has no servant. My mother cries when I talk to her. She tells me she doesn't want me to go away from her. But she's afraid of him. ‘Why don't you do what he wants?’ she says.”

She sat staring in front of her at the gathering night. She spoke again in an even tone.

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"I hate telling you these things. It is you . . . If you didn't mind . . . But you make it all different. I could do it—if it wasn't for you. I was . . . I *was* helping . . . I had gone meaning to help if anything went wrong at Mr. Lagune's. Yes—that night. No . . . don't! It was too hard before to tell you. But I really did not feel it . . . until I saw you there. Then all at once I felt shabby and mean."

"Well?" said Lewisham.

"That's all. I may have done thought-reading, but I have never really cheated since—*never*. . . . If you knew how hard it is . . ."

"I wish you had told me that before."

"I couldn't. Before you came it was different. He used to make fun of the people—used to imitate Lagune and make me laugh. It seemed a sort of joke." She stopped abruptly. "Why did you ever come on with me? I told you not to—you *know* I did."

She was near wailing. For a minute she was silent.

"I can't go to his sister's," she cried. "I may be a coward—but I can't."

Pause. And then Lewisham saw his solution straight and clear. Suddenly his secret desire had become his manifest duty.

"Look here," he said, not looking at her and pulling his moustache. "I won't have you doing any more of that damned cheating. You shan't soil yourself any more. And I won't have you leaving London."

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“But what am I to do?” Her voice went up.

“Well—there is one thing you can do. If you dare.”

“What is it?”

He made no answer for some seconds. Then he turned round and sat looking at her. Their eyes met. . . .

The grey of his mind began to colour. Her face was white and she was looking at him, in fear and perplexity. A new tenderness for her sprang up in him—a new feeling. Hitherto he had loved and desired her sweetness and animation—but now she was white and weary-eyed. He felt as though he had forgotten her and suddenly remembered. A great longing came into his mind.

“But what is the other thing I can do?”

It was strangely hard to say. There came a peculiar sensation in his throat and facial muscles, a nervous stress between laughing and crying. All the world vanished before that great desire. And he was afraid she would not dare, that she would not take him seriously.

“What is it?” she said again.

“Don’t you see that we can marry?” he said, with the flood of his resolution suddenly strong and steady. “Don’t you see that is the only thing for us? The dead lane we are in! You must come out of your cheating, and I must come out of my . . . cramming. And we—we must marry.”

He paused and then became eloquent. “The world is against us, against—us. To you it offers money to cheat—to be ignoble. For it *is* ignoble!

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It offers you no honest way, only a miserable drudgery. And it keeps you from me. And me too it bribes with the promise of success—if I will desert you . . . You don't know all . . . We may have to wait for years—we may have to wait for ever, if we wait until life is safe. We may be separated. . . . We may lose one another altogether. . . . Let us fight against it. Why should we separate? Unless True Love is like the other things—an empty cant. This is the only way. We two—who belong to one another.”

She looked at him, her face perplexed with this new idea, her heart beating very fast. “We are so young,” she said. “And how are we to live? You get a guinea.”

“I can get more—I can earn more. I have thought it out. I have been thinking of it these two days. I have been thinking what we could do. I have money.”

“You have money?”

“Nearly a hundred pounds.”

“But we are so young— And my mother . . .”

“We won't ask her. We will ask no one. This is *our* affair. Ethel! this is *our* affair. It is not a question of ways and means—even before this—I have thought . . . Dear one!—*don't* you love me?”

She did not grasp his emotional quality. She looked at him with puzzled eyes—still practical—making the suggestion arithmetical.

“I could typewrite if I had a machine. I have heard——”

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“It’s not a question of ways and means. Now. Ethel—I have longed——”

He stopped. She looked at his face, at his eyes now eager and eloquent with the things that never shaped themselves into words.

“*Dare* you come with me?” he whispered.

Suddenly the world opened out in reality to her as sometimes it had opened out to her in wistful dreams. And she quailed before it. She dropped her eyes from his. She became a fellow-conspirator. “But, how——?”

“I will think how. Trust me! Surely we know each other now— Think! We two——”

“But I have never thought——”

“I could get apartments for us both. It would be so easy. And think of it—think—of what life would be!”

“How can I?”

“You will come?”

She looked at him, startled. “You know,” she said, “you must know I would like—I would love——”

“You will come.”

“But dear—! Dear, if you *make* me——”

“Yes!” cried Lewisham triumphantly. “You will come.” He glanced round and his voice dropped. “Oh! my dearest! my dearest! . . .”

His voice sank to an inaudible whisper. But his face was eloquent. Two garrulous, home-going clerks passed opportunely to remind him that his emotions were in a public place.

CHAPTER XX

THE CAREER IS SUSPENDED

ON the Wednesday afternoon following this—it was hard upon the botanical examination—Mr. Lewisham was observed by Smithers in the big Education Library reading in a volume of the British Encyclopædia. Beside him were the current Whitaker's Almanac, an open notebook, a book from the Contemporary Science Series, and the Science and Art Department's Directory. Smithers, who had a profound sense of Lewisham's superiority in the art of obtaining facts of value in examinations, wondered for some minutes what valuable tip for a student in botany might be hidden in Whitaker, and on reaching his lodgings spent some time over the landlady's copy. But really Lewisham was not studying botany, but the art of marriage according to the best authorities. (The book from the Contemporary Science Series was Professor Letourneau's "Evolution of Marriage." It was interesting certainly, but of little immediate use.)

From Whitaker Lewisham learned that it would be possible at a cost of £2 6s. 1d. or £2 7s. 1d. (one of the items was ambiguous) to get married within the week—that charge being exclusive of vails—at the district registry office. He did little addition sums in the notebook. The church fees he found were variable, but for more personal reasons he rejected a

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marriage at church. Marriage by certificate at a registrar's involved an inconvenient delay. It would have to be £2 7s. 1d. Vails—ten shillings, say.

Afterwards, without needless ostentation, he produced a cheque-book and a deposit-book, and proceeded to further arithmetic. He found that he was master of £61 4s. 7d. Not a hundred as he had said, but a fine big sum—men have started great businesses on less. It had been a hundred originally. Allowing five pounds for the marriage and moving, this would leave about £56. Plenty. No provision was made for flowers, carriages or the honeymoon. But there would be a typewriter to buy. Ethel was to do her share. . . .

“It will be a devilish close thing,” said Lewisham with a quite unreasonable exultation. For, strangely enough, the affair was beginning to take on a flavour of adventure not at all unpleasant. He leaned back in his chair with the notebook closed in his hand. . . .

But there was much to see to that afternoon. First of all he had to discover the district superintendent registrar, and then to find a lodging whither he should take Ethel—their lodging, where they were to live together.

At the thought of that new life together that was drawing so near, she came into his head, vivid and near and warm. . . .

He recovered himself from a day dream. He became aware of a library attendant down the room leaning forward over his desk, gnawing the tip of a paper knife after the fashion of South Kensington library attendants, and staring at him curiously. It

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occurred to Lewisham that thought-reading was one of the most possible things in the world. He blushed, rose clumsily and took the volume of the Encyclopædia back to its shelf.

He found the selection of lodgings a difficult business. After his first essay he began to fancy himself a suspicious-looking character, and that perhaps hampered him. He had chosen the district southward of the Brompton Road. It had one disadvantage—he might blunder into a house with a fellow-student. . . . Not that it mattered vitally. But the fact is, it is rather unusual for married couples to live permanently in furnished lodgings in London. People who are too poor to take a house or a flat commonly find it best to take part of a house or unfurnished apartments. There are in London to every couple living in furnished apartments, a hundred in unfurnished rooms (“with the use of kitchen”). To the discreet landlady the absence of furniture predicates a dangerous want of capital. The first landlady Lewisham interviewed didn’t like ladies, they required such a lot of attendance, the second was of the same mind, the third told Mr. Lewisham he was “youngish to be married,” the fourth said she only “did” for single “gents.” The fifth was a young person with an arch manner, who liked to know all about people she took in, and subjected Lewisham to a searching cross-examination. When she had spitted him in a downright lie or so, she expressed an opinion that her rooms “would scarcely do,” and bowed him amiably out.

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He cooled his ears and cheeks by walking up and down the street for a space, and then tried again. This landlady was a terrible and pitiful person, so grey and dusty she was, and her face deep lined with dust and trouble and labour. She wore a dirty cap that was all askew. She took Lewisham up into a threadbare room on the first floor. "There's the use of a piano," she said, and indicated an instrument with a front of torn green silk. Lewisham opened the keyboard and evoked a vibration of broken strings. He took one further survey of the dismal place. "Eighteen shillings," he said. "Thank you . . . I'll let you know." The woman smiled with the corners of her mouth down, and without a word moved wearily towards the door. Lewisham felt a transient wonder at her hopeless position, but he did not pursue the inquiry.

The next landlady sufficed. She was a clean-looking German woman, rather smartly dressed; she had a fringe of flaxen curls and a voluble flow of words, for the most part recognisably English. With this she sketched out remarks. Fifteen shillings was her demand for a minute bedroom and a small sitting-room, separated by folding doors on the ground floor, and her personal services. Coals were to be "sixpence a kettle," she said—a pretty substitute for scuttle. She had not understood Lewisham to say he was married. But she had no hesitation. "Aay-teen shillin'," she said imperturbably. "Paid furs day ich wik . . . See?" Mr. Lewisham surveyed the rooms again. They looked clean, and the bonus tea vases, the rancid, gilt-framed oleographs, two

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toilet tidies used as ornaments, and the fact that the chest of drawers had been crowded out of the bedroom into the sitting-room, simply appealed to his sense of humour. "I'll take 'em from Saturday next," he said.

She was sure he would like them and proposed to give him his book forthwith. She mentioned casually that the previous lodger had been a captain and had stayed three years. (One never hears by any chance of lodgers stopping for a shorter period.) Something happened (German) and now he kept his carriage—apparently an outcome of his stay. She returned with a small penny account-book, a bottle of ink and an execrable pen, wrote Lewisham's name on the cover of this, and a receipt for eighteen shillings on the first page. She was evidently a person of considerable business aptitude. Lewisham paid, and the transaction terminated. "Szhure to be gomfortable" followed him comfortingly to the street.

Then he went on to Chelsea and interviewed a fatherly gentleman at the Registrar's office. The fatherly gentleman was chubby-faced and spectacled, and his manner was sympathetic but business-like. He "called back" each item of the interview. "And what can I do for you? You wish to be married! By licence?"

"By licence."

"By licence!"

And so forth. He opened a book and made neat entries of the particulars.

"The lady's age?"

"Twenty-one."

"A very suitable age . . . for a lady."

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He advised Lewisham to get a ring and said he would need two witnesses.

“*Well—*” hesitated Lewisham.

“There is always some one about,” said the superintendent registrar. “And they are quite used to it.”

Thursday and Friday Lewisham passed in exceedingly high spirits. No consciousness of the practical destruction of the Career seems to have troubled him at this time. Doubt had vanished from his universe for a space. He wanted to dance along the corridors. He felt curiously irresponsible and threw up an unpleasant sort of humour that pleased nobody. He wished Miss Heydinger many happy returns of the day, *à propos* of nothing, and he threw a bun across the refreshment room at Smithers and hit one of the Art School officials. Both were extremely silly things to do. In the first instance he was penitent immediately after the outrage, but in the second he added insult to injury by going across the room and asking in an offensively suspicious manner if any one had seen his bun. He crawled under a table and found it at last, rather dusty but quite eatable, under the chair of a lady art student. He sat down by Smithers to eat it, while he argued with the Art official. The Art official said the manners of the Science students were getting unbearable, and threatened to bring the matter before the refreshment-room Committee. Lewisham said it was a pity to make such a fuss about a trivial thing, and proposed that the Art official should throw his lunch—steak and kidney pudding—across the room at him, Lewisham, and so get immediate satisfaction. He

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then apologised to the official and pointed out in extenuation that it was a very long and difficult shot he had attempted. The official then drank a crumb, or breathed some beer, or something of that sort, and the discussion terminated. In the afternoon, however, Lewisham, to his undying honour, felt acutely ashamed of himself. Miss Heydinger would not speak to him.

On Saturday morning he absented himself from the schools, pleading by post a slight indisposition, and took all his earthly goods to the booking-office at Vauxhall Station. Chaffery's sister lived at Tongham, near Farnham, and Ethel, dismissed a week since by Lagune, had started that morning, under her mother's maudlin supervision, to begin her new slavery. She was to alight either at Farnham or Woking, as opportunity arose, and return to Vauxhall to meet him. So that Lewisham's vigil on the main platform was of indefinite duration.

At first he felt the exhilaration of a great adventure. Then, as he paced the long platform, came a philosophical mood, a sense of entire detachment from the world. He saw a bundle of uprooted plants beside the portmanteau of a fellow-passenger and it suggested a grotesque simile. His roots, his earthly possessions, were all downstairs in the booking-office. What a flimsy thing he was! A box of books and a trunk of clothes, some certificates and scraps of paper, an entry here and an entry there, a body not over strong—and the vast multitude of people about him—against him—the huge world in which he found himself! Did it matter anything to one human soul

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save her if he ceased to exist forthwith? And miles away perhaps she also was feeling little and lonely. . . .

Would she have trouble with her luggage? Suppose her aunt were to come to Farnham Junction to meet her? Suppose some one stole her purse? Suppose she came too late! The marriage was to take place at two. . . . Suppose she never came at all! After three trains in succession had disappointed him his vague feelings of dread gave place to a profound depression. . . .

But she came at last, and it was twenty-three minutes to two. He hurried her luggage downstairs, booked it with his own, and in another minute they were in a hansom—their first experience of that species of conveyance—on the way to the Registrar's office. They had said scarcely anything to one another, save hasty directions from Lewisham, but their eyes were full of excitement, and under the apron of the cab their hands were gripped together.

The little old gentleman was business-like but kindly. They made their vows to him, to a lean black-bearded clerk and a lady who took off an apron in the nether part of the building to attend. The little old gentleman made no long speeches. "You are young people," he said slowly, "and life together is a difficult thing. . . . Be kind to each other." He smiled, and held out a friendly hand.

Ethel's eyes glistened and she found she could not speak.

CHAPTER XXI

HOME

THEN a furtive payment of witnesses, and Lewisham was beside her. His face was radiant. A steady current of workers going home to their half-holiday rest poured along the street. On the steps before them lay a few grains of rice from some more public nuptials.

A critical little girl eyed our couple curiously and made some remark to her ragamuffin friend.

“Not them,” said the ragamuffin friend. “They’ve only been askin’ questions.”

The ragamuffin friend was no judge of faces.

They walked back through the thronged streets to Vauxhall Station, saying little to one another, and there Lewisham, assuming as indifferent a manner as he could command, recovered their possessions from the booking-office by means of two separate tickets and put them aboard a four-wheeler. His luggage went outside, but the little brown portmanteau containing Ethel’s trousseau was small enough to go on the seat in front of them. You must figure a rather broken-down four-wheeler bearing the yellow-painted box and the experienced trunk and Mr. Lewisham and all his fortunes, a despondent fitful horse, and a threadbare venerable driver, blasphemous *sotto voce* and flagellant, in an ancient coat with capes. When our two young people found

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themselves in the cab again a certain stiffness of manner between them vanished and there was more squeezing of hands. "Ethel *Lewisham*," said Lewisham several times, and Ethel reciprocated with "Husbinder" and "Hubby dear," and took off her glove to look again in an ostentatious manner at a ring. And she kissed the ring.

They were resolved that their newly-married state should not appear, and with considerable ceremony it was arranged that he should treat her with off-hand brusqueness when they arrived at their lodging. The Teutonic landlady appeared in the passage with an amiable smile and the hope that they had had a pleasant journey, and became voluble with promises of comfort. Lewisham having assisted the slatternly general servant to carry in his boxes, paid the cabman a florin in a resolute manner and followed the ladies into the sitting-room.

Ethel answered Madam Gadow's inquiries with admirable self-possession, followed her through the folding doors and displayed an intelligent interest in a new spring mattress. Presently the folding doors were closed again. Lewisham hovered about the front room pulling his moustache and pretending to admire the oleographs, surprised to find himself trembling. . . .

The slatternly general servant reappeared with the chops and tinned salmon he had asked Madam Gadow to prepare for them. He went and stared out of the window, heard the door close behind the girl, and turned at a sound as Ethel appeared shyly through the folding doors.

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She was suddenly domestic. Hitherto he had seen her without a hat and jacket only on one indistinct dramatic occasion. Now she wore a little blouse of soft, dark red material, with a white froth about the wrists and that pretty neck of hers. And her hair was a new wonderland of curls and soft strands. How delicate she looked and sweet as she stood hesitating there. These gracious moments in life! He took two steps and held out his arms. She glanced at the closed door of the room and came flitting towards him. . . .

CHAPTER XXII

EPITHALAMY

FOR three indelible days Lewisham's existence was a fabric of fine emotions, life was too wonderful and beautiful for any doubts or forethought. To be with Ethel was perpetual delight—she astonished this sisterless youngster with a thousand feminine niceties and refinements. She shamed him for his strength and clumsiness. And the light in her eyes and the warmth in her heart that lit them!

Even to be away from her was a wonder and in its way delightful. He was no common Student, he was a man with a Secret Life. To part from her on Monday near South Kensington station and go up Exhibition Road among all the fellows who lived in sordid, lonely lodgings and were boys to his day-old experience! To neglect one's work and sit back and dream of meeting again! To slip off to the shady churchyard behind the Oratory when, or even a little before, the midday bell woke the great staircase to activity, and to meet a smiling face and hear a soft voice saying sweet foolish things! And after four another meeting and the walk home—their own home.

No little form now went from him and flitted past a gas lamp down a foggy vista, taking his desire with her. Never more was that to be. Lewisham's long hours in the laboratory were spent largely in

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a dreamy meditation, in—to tell the truth—the invention of foolish terms of endearment: “Dear Wife,” “Dear Little Wife Thing,” “Sweetest Dearest Little Wife,” “Dillywings.” A pretty employment! And these are quite a fair specimen of his originality during those wonderful days. A moment of heart-searching in that particular matter led to the discovery of hitherto undreamt-of kindred with Swift. For Lewisham, like Swift and most other people, had hit upon the Little Language. Indeed it was a very foolish time.

Such section cutting as he did that third day of his married life—and he did very little—was a thing to marvel at. Bindon, the botany professor, under the fresh shock of his performance, protested to a colleague in the grill room that never had a student been so foolishly overrated.

And Ethel too had a fine emotional time. She was mistress of a home,—*their* home together. She shopped and was called “Ma’am” by respectful, good-looking shop men; she designed meals and copied out papers of notes with a rich sense of helpfulness. And ever and again she would stop writing and sit dreaming. And for four bright week-days she went to and fro to accompany and meet Lewisham and listen greedily to the latest fruits of his imagination.

The landlady was very polite and conversed entertainingly about the very extraordinary and dissolute servants that had fallen to her lot. And Ethel disguised her newly wedded state by a series of ingenious prevarications. She wrote a letter that

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Saturday evening to her mother—Lewisham had helped her to write it—making a sort of proclamation of her heroic departure and promising a speedy visit. They posted the letter so that it might not be delivered until Monday.

She was quite sure with Lewisham that only the possible dishonour of mediumship could have brought their marriage about—she sank the mutual attraction beyond even her own vision. There was more than a touch of magnificence, you perceive, about this affair.

It was Lewisham had persuaded her to delay that reassuring visit until Monday night. “One whole day of honeymoon,” he insisted, was to be theirs. In his prenuptial meditations he had not clearly focussed the fact that even after marriage some sort of relations with Mr. and Mrs. Chaffery would still go on. Even now he was exceedingly disinclined to face that obvious necessity. He foresaw, in spite of a resolute attempt to ignore it, that there would be explanatory scenes of some little difficulty. But the prevailing magnificence carried him over this trouble.

“Let us at least have this little time for ourselves,” he said, and that seemed to settle their position.

Save for its brevity and these intimations of future trouble it was a very fine time indeed. Their mid-day dinner together, for example—it was a little cold when at last they came to it on Saturday—was immense fun. There was no marked subsidence of appetite; they ate extremely well in spite of the

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meeting of their souls, and in spite of certain shiftings of chairs and hand claspings and similar delays. He really made the acquaintance of her hands then for the first time, plump white hands with short white fingers, and the engagement ring had come out of its tender hiding-place and acted as keeper to the wedding ring. Their eyes were perpetually flitting about the room and coming back to mutual smiles. All their movements were faintly tremulous.

She professed to be vastly interested and amused by the room and its furniture and her position, and he was delighted by her delight. She was particularly entertained by the chest of drawers in the living-room, and by Lewisham's witticisms at the toilet tidies and the oleographs.

And after the chops and most of the tinned salmon and the very new loaf were gone they fell to with fine effect upon a tapioca pudding. Their talk was fragmentary. "Did you hear her call me *Madame*? *Mádáme*—so!" "And presently I must go out and do some shopping. There are all the things for Sunday and Monday morning to get. I must make a list. It will never do to let her know how little I know about things. . . . I wish I knew more."

At the time Lewisham regarded her confession of domestic ignorance as a fine basis for facetiousness. He developed a fresh line of thought, and condoled with her on the inglorious circumstances of their wedding. "No bridesmaids," he said; "no little children scattering flowers, no carriages, no policemen to guard the wedding presents, nothing proper

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—nothing right. Not even a white favour. Only you and I.”

“Only you and I. *Oh!*”

“This is nonsense,” said Lewisham, after an interval.

“And think what we lose in the way of speeches,” he resumed. “Cannot you imagine the best man rising;—‘Ladies and gentlemen—the health of the bride.’ That is what the best man has to do, isn’t it?”

By way of answer she extended her hand.

“And do you know,” he said, after that had received due recognition, “we have never been introduced!”

“Neither have we!” said Ethel. “Neither have we! We have never been introduced!”

For some inscrutable reason it delighted them both enormously to think that they had never been introduced. . . .

In the later afternoon Lewisham, having unpacked his books to a certain extent and so forth, was visible to all men, visibly in the highest spirits, carrying home Ethel’s shopping. There were parcels and cones in blue and parcels in rough grey paper and a bag of confectionery, and out of one of the side pockets of that East-end overcoat the tail of a haddock protruded from its paper. Under such magnificent sanctions and amid such ignoble circumstances did this honeymoon begin.

On Sunday evening they went for a long rambling walk through the quiet streets, coming out at last into Hyde Park. The early spring night was mild and clear and the kindly moonlight was about

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them. They went to the bridge and looked down the Serpentine, with the lights of Paddington yellow and remote. They stood there, dim little figures and very close together. They whispered and became silent.

Presently it seemed that something passed, and Lewisham began talking in his magnificent vein. He likened the Serpentine to Life, and found Meaning in the dark banks of Kensington Gardens and the remote bright lights. "The long struggle," he said, "and the lights at the end,"—though he really did not know what he meant by the lights at the end. Neither did Ethel, though the emotion was indisputable. "We are Fighting the World," he said, finding great satisfaction in the thought. "All the world is against us—and we are fighting it all."

"We will not be beaten," said Ethel.

"How could we be beaten—together?" said Lewisham. "For you I would fight a dozen worlds."

It seemed a very sweet and noble thing to them under the sympathetic moonlight, almost indeed too easy for their courage, to be merely fighting the world.

"You 'aven't bin married ver' long," said Madam Gadow with an insinuating smile, when she re-admitted Ethel on Monday morning after Lewisham had been swallowed up by the Schools.

"No, I haven't *very* long," admitted Ethel.

"You are ver' 'appy," said Madam Gadow, and sighed.

"I was ver' 'appy," said Madam Gadow.

CHAPTER XXIII

MR. CHAFFERY AT HOME

THE golden mists of delight lifted a little on Monday, when Mr. and Mrs. G. E. Lewisham went to call on his mother-in-law and Mr. Chaffery. Mrs. Lewisham went in evident apprehension, but clouds of glory still hung about Lewisham's head, and his manner was heroic. He wore a cotton shirt and linen collar, and a very nice black satin tie that Mrs. Lewisham had bought on her own responsibility during the day. She naturally wanted him to look all right.

Mrs. Chaffery appeared in the half light of the passage as the top of a grimy cap over Ethel's shoulder and two black sleeves about her neck. She emerged as a small, middle-aged woman, with a thin little nose between silver-rimmed spectacles, a weak mouth and perplexed eyes, a queer little dust-lined woman with the oddest resemblance to Ethel in her face. She was trembling visibly with nervous agitation.

She hesitated, peering, and then kissed Mr. Lewisham effusively. "And this is Mr. Lewisham!" she said as she did so.

She was the third thing feminine to kiss Lewisham since the promiscuous days of his babyhood. "I was so afraid— There!" She laughed hysterically.

"You'll excuse my saying that it's comforting to

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see you—honest like and young. Not but what Ethel . . . *He* has been something dreadful,” said Mrs. Chaffery. “You didn’t ought to have written about that mesmerising. And of all letters that which Jane wrote—there! But he’s waiting and listening——”

“Are we to go downstairs, Mums?” asked Ethel.

“He’s waiting for you there,” said Mrs. Chaffery. She held a dismal little oil lamp, and they descended a tenebrous spiral structure into an underground breakfast-room lit by gas that shone through a partially frosted globe with cut-glass stars. That descent had a distinctly depressing effect upon Lewisham. He went first. He took a deep breath at the door. What on earth was Chaffery going to say? Not that he cared, of course.

Chaffery was standing with his back to the fire, trimming his finger-nails with a pocket-knife. His gilt glasses were tilted forward so as to make an inflamed knob at the top of his long nose, and he regarded Mr. and Mrs. Lewisham over them with—Lewisham doubted his eyes for a moment—but it was positively a smile, an essentially waggish smile.

“You’ve come back,” he said quite cheerfully over Lewisham to Ethel. There was a hint of falsetto in his voice.

“She has called to see her mother,” said Lewisham. “You, I believe, are Mr. Chaffery?”

“I would like to know who the Deuce *you* are?” said Chaffery, suddenly tilting his head back so as to look through his glasses instead of over them,

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and laughing genially. "For thorough-going Cheek, I'm inclined to think you take the Cake. Are you the Mr. Lewisham to whom this misguided girl refers in her letter?"

"I am."

"Maggie," said Mr. Chaffery to Mrs. Chaffery, "there is a class of being upon whom delicacy is lost—to whom delicacy is practically unknown. Has your daughter got her marriage lines?"

"Mr. Chaffery!" said Lewisham, and Mrs. Chaffery exclaimed, "James! How *can* you?"

Chaffery shut his penknife with a click and slipped it into his vest-pocket. Then he looked up again, speaking in the same equal voice. "I presume we are civilised persons prepared to manage our affairs in a civilised way. My stepdaughter vanishes for two nights and returns with an alleged husband. I at least am not disposed to be careless about her legal position."

"You ought to know her better—" began Lewisham.

"Why argue about it?" said Chaffery gaily, pointing a lean finger at Ethel's gesture, "when she has 'em in her pocket? She may just as well show me now. I thought so. Don't be alarmed at my handling them. Fresh copies can always be got at the nominal price of two-and-seven. Thank you . . . Lewisham, George Edgar. One and twenty. And . . . You—one and twenty! I never did know your age, my dear, exactly, and now your mother won't say. Student! Thank you. I am greatly obliged. Indeed I am greatly relieved. And now,

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what have you got to say for yourselves in this remarkable affair?"

"You had a letter," said Lewisham.

"I had a letter of excuses—the personalities I overlook . . . Yes, sir—they were excuses. You young people wanted to marry—and you seized an occasion. You did not even refer to the fact that you wanted to marry in your letter. Pure modesty! But now you have come here married. It disorganises this household, it inflicts endless bother on people, but never you mind that! I'm not blaming *you*. Nature's to blame! Neither of you know what you are in for yet. You will. You're married and that is the great essential thing. . . . (Ethel, my dear, just put your husband's hat and stick behind the door.) And you, sir, are so good as to disapprove of the way in which I earn my living?"

"Well," said Lewisham. "Yes—I'm bound to say I do."

"You are really *not* bound to say it. The modesty of inexperience would excuse you."

"Yes, but it isn't right—it isn't straight."

"Dogma," said Chaffery. "Dogma!"

"What do you mean by dogma?" asked Lewisham.

"I mean, dogma. But we must argue this out in comfort. It is our supper hour, and I'm not the man to fight against accomplished facts. We have intermarried. There it is. You must stop to supper—and you and I must thresh these things out. We've involved ourselves with each other and we've got to make the best of it. Your wife and mine will spread the board, and we will go on talking. Why

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not sit in that chair instead of leaning on the back? This is a home—*domus*—not a debating society—humble in spite of my manifest frauds. . . . That's better. And in the first place I hope—I do so hope”—Chaffery was suddenly very impressive—“that you're not a Dissenter.”

“Eh!” said Lewisham, and then, “No! I am *not* a Dissenter.”

“That's better,” said Mr. Chaffery. “I'm glad of that. I was just a little afraid— Something in your manner. I can't stand Dissenters. I've a peculiar dislike to Dissenters. To my mind it's the great drawback of this Clapham. You see . . . I have invariably found them deceitful—invariably.”

He grimaced and dropped his glasses with a click against his waistcoat buttons. “I'm very glad of that,” he said, replacing them. “The Dissenter, the Nonconformist Conscience, the Puritan, you know, the Vegetarian and Total Abstainer, and all that sort of thing, I cannot away with them. I have cleared my mind of cant and formulæ. I've a nature essentially Hellenic. Have you ever read Matthew Arnold?”

“Beyond my scientific reading——”

“Ah! you *should* read Matthew Arnold—a mind of singular clarity. In him you would find a certain quality that is sometimes a little wanting in your scientific men. They are apt to be a little too phenomenal, you know, a little too objective. Now I seek after noumena. Noumena, Mr. Lewisham! If you follow me——?”

He paused, and his eyes behind the glasses were

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mildly interrogative. Ethel re-entered without her hat and jacket, and with a noisy square black tray, a white cloth, some plates and knives and glasses, and began to lay the table.

“*I follow you,*” said Lewisham reddening. He had not the courage to admit ignorance of this remarkable word. “You state your case.”

“I seek after *noumena,*” repeated Chaffery with great satisfaction, and gesticulated with his hand, waving away everything but that. “I cannot do with surfaces and appearances. I am one of those nympholepts, you know, nympholepts. . . . Must pursue the truth of things! the elusive fundamental. . . . I make a rule, I never tell myself lies—never. There are few who can say that. To my mind—truth begins at home. And for the most part—stops there. Safest and seemliest! *you* know. With most men—with your typical Dissenter *par excellence*—it’s always gadding abroad, calling on the neighbours. You see my point of view?”

He glanced at Lewisham, who was conscious of an unwonted opacity of mind. He became wary, as wary as he could manage to be on the spur of the moment.

“It’s a little surprising, you know,” he said very carefully, “if I may say so—and considering what happened—to hear *you* . . .”

“Speaking of truth? Not when you understand my position. Not when you see where I stand. That is what I am getting at. That is what I am naturally anxious to make clear to you now that we have intermarried, now that you are my step-

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son-in-law. You're young, you know, you're young, and you're hard and fast. Only years can give a mind *tone*—mitigate the varnish of education. I gather from this letter—and your face—that you are one of the party that participated in that little affair at Lagune's."

He stuck out a finger at a point he had just seen. "By-the-bye!—That accounts for Ethel," he said.

Ethel rapped down the mustard on the table. "It does," she said, but not very loudly.

"But you had met before?" said Chaffery.

"At Whortley," said Lewisham.

"I see," said Chaffery.

"I was in— I was one of those who arranged the exposure," said Lewisham. "And now you have raised the matter, I am bound to say——"

"I knew," interrupted Chaffery. "But what a shock that was for Lagune!" He looked down at his toes for a moment with the corners of his mouth tucked in. "The hand dodge wasn't bad, you know," he said with a queer sidelong smile.

Lewisham was very busy for a moment trying to get this remark in focus. "I don't see it in the same light as you do," he explained at last.

"Can't get away from your moral bias, eh?— Well, well. We'll go into all that. But apart from its moral merits—simply as an artistic trick—it was not bad."

"I don't know much about tricks——"

"So few who undertake exposures do. You admit you never heard or thought of that before—the bladder, I mean. Yet it's as obvious as tintacks that a medium who's hampered at his hands will do all

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he can with his teeth, and what *could* be so self-evident as a bladder under one's lapel? What could be? Yet I know psychic literature pretty well and it's never been suggested even! Never. It's a perpetual surprise to me how many things are *not* thought of by investigators. For one thing, they never count the odds against them, and that puts them wrong at the start. Look at it! I am by nature tricky. I spend all my leisure standing or sitting about and thinking up or practising new little tricks, because it amuses me immensely to do so. The whole thing amuses me. Well—what is the result of these meditations? Take one thing:—I know eight and forty ways of making raps—of which at least ten are original. Ten original ways of making raps.” His manner was very impressive. “And some of them simply tremendous raps. There!”

A confirmatory rap exploded—as it seemed between Lewisham and Chaffery.

“*Eh?*” said Chaffery.

The mantelpiece opened a dropping fire, and the table went off under Lewisham's nose like a cracker.

“You see?” said Chaffery, putting his hands under the tail of his coat. The whole room seemed snapping its fingers at Lewisham for a space.

“Very well, and now take the other side. Take the severest test I ever tried. Two respectable professors of physics—not Newtons, you understand, but good, worthy, self-important professors of physics—a lady anxious to prove there's a life beyond the grave, a journalist who wants stuff to write—a person, that is, who gets his living by these

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researches just as I do—undertook to test me. Test *me!* . . . Of course they had their other work to do, professing physics, professing religion, organising research, and so forth. At the outside they don't think an hour a day about it, and most of them had never cheated anybody in their existence, and couldn't, for example, travel without a ticket for a three-mile journey and not get caught, to save their lives. . . . Well—you see the odds?"

He paused. Lewisham appeared involved in some interior struggle.

"You know," explained Chaffery, "it was quite an accident you got me—quite. The thing slipped out of my mouth. Or your friend with the flat voice wouldn't have had a chance. Not a chance."

Lewisham spoke like a man who is lifting a weight. "All *this*, you know, is off the question. I'm not disputing your ability. But the thing is . . . it isn't right."

"We're coming to that," said Chaffery.

"It's evident we look at things in a different light."

"That's it. That's just what we've got to discuss. Exactly!"

"Cheating is cheating. You can't get away from that. That's simple enough."

"Wait till I've done with it," said Chaffery with a certain zest. "Of course it's imperative you should understand my position. It isn't as though I hadn't one. Ever since I read your letter I've been thinking over that. Really!—a justification! In a way you might almost say I had a mission.

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A sort of prophet. You really don't see the beginning of it yet."

"Oh, but hang it!" protested Lewisham.

"Ah! you're young, you're crude. My dear young man, you're only at the beginning of things. You really must concede a certain possibility of wider views to a man more than twice your age. But here's supper. For a little while at any rate we'll call a truce."

Ethel had come in again bearing an additional chair, and Mrs. Chaffery appeared behind her, crowning the preparations with a jug of small beer. The cloth, Lewisham observed, as he turned towards it, had several undarned holes and discoloured places, and in the centre stood a tarnished cruet which contained mustard, pepper, vinegar, and three ambiguous dried-up bottles. The bread was on an ample board with a pious rim, and an honest wedge of cheese loomed disproportionate on a little plate. Mr. and Mrs. Lewisham were seated facing one another, and Mrs. Chaffery sat in the broken chair because she understood its ways.

"This cheese is as nutritious and unattractive and indigestible as Science," remarked Chaffery, cutting and passing wedges. "But crush it—so—under your fork, add a little of this good Dorset butter, a dab of mustard, pepper—the pepper is very necessary—and some malt vinegar, and crush together. You get a compound called Crab and by no means disagreeable. So the wise deal with the facts of life, neither bolting nor rejecting, but adapting."

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“As though pepper and mustard were not facts,” said Lewisham, scoring his solitary point that evening.

Chaffery admitted the collapse of his image in very complimentary terms, and Lewisham could not avoid a glance across the table at Ethel. He remembered immediately afterwards that Chaffery was a slippery scoundrel whose blame was better than his praise.

For a time the Crab engaged Chaffery, and the conversation languished. Mrs. Chaffery asked Ethel formal questions about their lodgings, and Ethel’s answers were buoyant. “You must come and have tea one day,” said Ethel, not waiting for Lewisham’s indorsement, “and see it all.”

Chaffery astonished Lewisham by suddenly displaying a complete acquaintance with his status as a South Kensington teacher in training. “I suppose you have some money beyond that guinea,” said Chaffery off-handedly.

“Enough to go on with,” said Lewisham reddening.

“And you look to them at South Kensington to do something for you—a hundred a year or so, when your scholarship is up?”

“Yes,” said Lewisham a little reluctantly. “Yes. A hundred a year or so. That’s the sort of idea. And there’s lots of places beyond South Kensington, of course, even if they don’t put me up there.”

“I see,” said Chaffery; “but it will be a pretty close shave for all that—one hundred a year. Well, well—there’s many a deserving man has to do with

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less," and after a meditative pause he asked Lewisham to pass the beer.

"Hev you a mother living, Mr. Lewisham?" said Mrs. Chaffery suddenly, and pursued him through the tale of his connections. When he came to the plumber, Mrs. Chaffery remarked with an unexpected air of consequence, that most families have their poor relations. Then the air of consequence vanished again into the past from which it had arisen.

Supper finished, Chaffery poured the residuum of the beer into his glass, produced a Broseley clay of the longest sort, and invited Lewisham to smoke. "Honest smoking," said Chaffery, tapping the bowl of his clay, and added: "In this country—cigars—sound cigars—and honesty rarely meet."

Lewisham fumbled in his pocket for his Algerian cigarettes, and Chaffery having regarded them unfavourably through his glasses, took up the thread of his promised apologia. The ladies retired to wash up the supper things.

"You see," said Chaffery, opening abruptly so soon as the clay was drawing, "about this cheating—I do not find life such a simple matter as you do."

"I don't find life simple," said Lewisham, "but I do think there's a Right and a Wrong in things. And I don't think you have said anything so far to show that spiritualistic cheating is Right."

"Let us thresh the matter out," said Chaffery, crossing his legs; "let us thresh the matter out. Now"—he drew at his pipe—"I don't think you fully appreciate the importance of Illusion in life,

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the Essential Nature of Lies and Deception of the body politic. You are inclined to discredit one particular form of Imposture, because it is not generally admitted—carries a certain discredit, and—witness the heel edges of my trouser legs, witness yonder viands—small rewards.”

“It’s not that,” said Lewisham.

“Now I am prepared to maintain,” said Chaffery, proceeding with his proposition, “that Honesty is essentially an anarchistic and disintegrating force in society, that communities are held together and the progress of civilisation made possible only by vigorous and sometimes even violent Lying; that the Social Contract is nothing more nor less than a vast conspiracy of human beings to lie to and humbug themselves and one another for the general Good. Lies are the mortar that bind the savage individual man into the social masonry. There is the general thesis upon which I base my justification. My mediumship, I can assure you, is a particular instance of the general assertion. Were I not of a profoundly indolent, restless, adventurous nature, and horribly averse to writing, I would make a great book of this and live honoured by every profound duffer in the world.”

“But how are you going to prove it?”

“Prove it! It simply needs pointing out. Even now there are men—Bernard Shaw, Ibsen, and such-like—who have seen bits of it in a new-gospel-grubbing sort of fashion. What is man? Lust and greed tempered by fear and an irrational vanity.”

“I don’t agree with that,” said Mr. Lewisham.

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“You will as you grow older,” said Chaffery. “There’s truths you have to grow into. But about this matter of Lies—let us look at the fabric of society, let us compare the savage. You will discover the only essential difference between savage and civilised is this: The former hasn’t learned to shirk the truth of things, and the latter has. Take the most obvious difference—the clothing of the civilised man, his invention of decency. What is clothing? The concealment of essential facts. What is decorum? Suppression! I don’t argue against decency and decorum, mind you, but there they are—essentials to civilisation and essentially ‘*suppressio veri*.’ And in the pockets of his clothes our citizen carries money. The pure savage has no money. To him a lump of metal is a lump of metal—possibly ornamental—no more. That’s right. To any lucid-minded man it’s the same or different only through the gross folly of his fellows. But to the common civilised man the universal exchangeability of this gold is a sacred and fundamental fact. Think of it! Why should it be? There isn’t a why! I live in perpetual amazement at the gullibility of my fellow-creatures. Of a morning sometimes, I can assure you, I lie in bed fancying that people may have found out this swindle in the night, expect to hear a tumult downstairs and see your mother-in-law come rushing into the room with a rejected shilling from the milkman. ‘What’s this?’ says he. ‘This Muck for milk?’ But it never happens. Never. If it did, if people suddenly cleared their minds of this cant of money, what would happen? The true

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nature of man would appear. I should whip out of bed, seize some weapon, and after the milkman forthwith. It's becoming to keep the peace, but it's necessary to have milk. The neighbours would come pouring out—also after milk. Milkman, suddenly enlightened, would start clattering up the street. After him! Clutch—tear! Got him! Over goes the cart! Fight if you like, but don't upset the can! . . . Don't you see it all—perfectly reasonable every bit of it. I should return, bruised and bloody, with the milk-can under my arm. Yes—I should have the milk-can—I should keep my eye on that. . . . But why go on? You of all men should know that life is a struggle for existence, a fight for food. Money is just the lie that mitigates our fury.”

“No,” said Lewisham; “no! I'm not prepared to admit that.”

“What *is* money?”

Mr. Lewisham dodged. “You state your case first,” he said. “I really don't see what all this has to do with cheating at a *séance*.”

“I weave my defence from this loom, though. Take some aggressively respectable sort of man—a bishop, for example.”

“Well,” said Lewisham, “I don't much hold with bishops.”

“It doesn't matter. Take a professor of science, walking the earth. Remark his clothing, making him a decent citizen, concealing the fact that physically he is a flabby, pot-bellied degenerate. That is the first Lie of his being. No fringes round *his* trousers, my boy. Notice his hair, groomed

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and clipped, the tacit lie that its average length is half an inch, whereas in nature he would wave a few score yard-long hairs of ginger grey to the winds of heaven. Notice the smug suppressions of his face. In his mouth are Lies in the shape of false teeth. Then on the earth somewhere poor devils are toiling to get him meat and corn and wine. He is clothed in the lives of bent and thwarted weavers, his way is lit by phossy jaw, he eats from lead-glazed crockery—all his ways are paved with the lives of men. . . . Think of the chubby, comfortable creature! And, as Swift has it—to think that such a thing should deal in pride! . . . He pretends that his blessed little researches are in some way a fair return to these remote beings for their toil, their suffering; pretends that he and his parasitic career are payment for their thwarted desires. Imagine him bullying his gardener over some transplanted geraniums, the thick mist of lies they stand in, so that the man does not immediately, with the edge of a spade, smite down his impertinence to the dust from which it rose. . . . And his case is the case of all comfortable lives. What a lie and sham all civility is, all good breeding, all culture and refinement, while one poor ragged wretch drags hungry on the earth!”

“But this is Socialism!” said Lewisham. “I——”

“No Ism,” said Chaffery, raising his rich voice. “Only the ghastly truth of things—the truth that the warp and the woof of the world of men is Lying. Socialism is no remedy, no *ism* is a remedy; things are so.”

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"I don't agree—" began Lewisham.

"Not with the hopelessness, because you are young, but with the description you do."

"Well—within limits."

"You agree that most respectable positions in the world are tainted with the fraud of our social conditions. If they were not tainted with fraud they would not be respectable. Even your own position—Who gave you the right to marry and prosecute interesting scientific studies while other young men rot in mines?"

"I admit——"

"You can't help admitting. And here is my position. Since all ways of life are tainted with fraud, since to live and speak the truth is beyond human strength and courage—as one finds it—is it not better for a man that he engage in some straightforward comparatively harmless cheating, than if he risk his mental integrity in some ambiguous position and fall at last into self-deception and self-righteousness? That is the essential danger. That is the thing I always guard against. Heed that! It is the master sin. Self-righteousness."

Mr. Lewisham pulled at his moustache.

"You begin to take me. And after all, these worthy people do not suffer so greatly. If I did not take their money some other imposter would. Their huge conceit of intelligence would breed perhaps some viler swindle than my facetious rappings. That's the line our doubting bishops take, and why shouldn't I? For example, these people might give it to Public Charities, minister to the fattened secre-

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tary, the prodigal younger son. After all, at worst, I am a sort of latter-day Robin Hood; I take from the rich according to their incomes. I don't give to the poor certainly, I don't get enough. But—there are other good works. Many a poor weakling have I comforted with Lies, great thumping, silly Lies, about the grave! Compare me with one of those rascals who disseminate phossy jaw and lead poisons, compare me with a millionaire who runs a music hall with an eye to feminine talent, or an underwriter, or the common stockbroker. Or any sort of lawyer. . . .

“There are bishops,” said Chaffery, “who believe in Darwin and doubt Moses. Now I hold myself better than they—analogous perhaps but better—for I do at least invent something of the tricks I play—I do do that.”

“That's all very well,” began Lewisham.

“I might forgive them their dishonesty,” said Chaffery, “but the stupidity of it, the mental self-abnegation—Lord! If a solicitor doesn't swindle in the proper shabby-magnificent way, they chuck him for unprofessional conduct.” He paused. He became meditative, and smiled faintly.

“Now some of *my* dodges,” he said with a sudden change of voice, turning towards Lewisham, his eyes smiling over his glasses and an emphatic hand patting the tablecloth; “some of *my* dodges are *damned* ingenious, you know—*damned* ingenious—and well worth double the money they bring me—double.”

He turned towards the fire again, pulling at his

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smouldering pipe and eyeing Lewisham over the corner of his glasses.

“One or two of my little things would make Maskelyne sit up,” he said presently. “They would set that mechanical orchestra playing out of pure astonishment. I really must explain some of them to you—now we have intermarried.”

It took Mr. Lewisham a minute or so to re-form the regiment of his mind, disordered by its headlong pursuit of Chaffery’s flying arguments. “But on your principles you might do almost anything!” he said.

“Precisely!” said Chaffery.

“But——”

“It is rather a curious method,” protested Chaffery; “to test one’s principles of action by judging the resultant actions on some other principle, isn’t it?”

Lewisham took a moment to think. “I suppose that is so,” he said, in the manner of a man convinced against his will.

He perceived his logic insufficient. He suddenly thrust the delicacies of argument aside. Certain sentences he had brought ready for use in his mind came up and he delivered them abruptly. “Anyhow,” he said, “I don’t agree with this cheating. In spite of what you say, I hold to what I said in my letter. Ethel’s connection with all these things is at an end. I shan’t go out of my way to expose you, of course, but if it comes in my way I shall speak my mind of all these spiritualistic phenomena. It’s just as well that we should know about where we are.”

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“That is clearly understood, my dear stepson-in-law,” said Chaffery. “Our present object is discussion.”

“But Ethel——”

“Ethel is yours,” said Chaffery. “Ethel is yours,” he repeated after an interval, and added pensively, —“to keep.”

“But talking of Illusion,” he resumed, dismissing the sordid with a sign of relief, “I sometimes think with Bishop Berkeley, that all experience is probably something quite different from reality. That consciousness is *essentially* hallucination. I here, and you, and our talk—it is all Illusion. Bring your Science to bear—what am I? A cloudy multitude of atoms, an infinite interplay of little cells. Is this hand that I hold out, me? This head? Is the surface of my skin any more than a rude average boundary? You say it is my mind that is me? But consider the war of motives. Suppose I have an impulse that I resist—it is *I* resist it—the impulse is outside me, eh? But suppose that impulse carries me and I do the thing—that impulse is part of me, is it not? Ah! My brain reels at these mysteries! Lord! what flimsy fluctuating things we are—first this, then that, a thought, an impulse, a deed and a forgetting, and all the time madly cock-sure we are ourselves. And as for you—you who have hardly learned to think for more than five or six short years, there you sit, assured, coherent, there you sit in all your inherited original sin,—Hallucinatory Windlestraw!—judging and condemning. *You* know Right from Wrong! My boy, so did Adam and Eve

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. . . so soon as they'd had dealings with the father of lies!"

At the end of the evening whiskey and hot water were produced, and Chaffery, now in a mood of great urbanity, said he had rarely enjoyed any one's conversation so much as Lewisham's, and insisted upon every one having whiskey. Mrs. Chaffery and Ethel added sugar and lemon. Lewisham felt an instantaneous mild surprise at the sight of Ethel drinking grog.

At the door Mrs. Chaffery kissed Lewisham an effusive good-bye and told Ethel she really believed it was all for the best.

On the way home Lewisham was thoughtful and preoccupied. The problem of Chaffery assumed enormous proportions. At times indeed even that good man's own philosophical sketch of himself as a practical exponent of mental sincerity touched with humour and the artistic spirit, seemed plausible. Lagune was an undeniable ass, and conceivably psychic research was an incentive to trickery. Then he remembered the matter in his relation to Ethel. . . .

"Your stepfather is a little hard to follow," he said at last, sitting on the bed and taking off one boot. "He's dodgy—he's so confoundedly dodgy. One doesn't know where to take hold of him. He's got such a break he's clean bowled me again and again."

He thought for a space, and then removed his boot and sat with it on his knee. "Of course! . . .

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all that he said was wrong—quite wrong. Right is right and cheating is cheating, whatever you say about it.”

“That’s what I feel about him,” said Ethel at the looking-glass. “That’s exactly how it seems to me.”

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CAMPAIGN OPENS

ON Saturday Lewisham was first through the folding doors. In a moment he reappeared with a document extended. Mrs. Lewisham stood arrested with her dress skirt in her hand, astonished at the astonishment on his face. "*I say!*" said Lewisham; "just look here!"

She looked at the book that he held open before her, and perceived that its vertical ruling betokened a sordid import, that its list of items in an illegible mixture of English and German was lengthy. "1 kettle of coals 6d." occurred regularly down that portentous array and buttoned it all together. It was Madam Gadow's first bill. Ethel took it out of his hand and examined it closer. It looked no smaller closer. The overcharges were scandalous. It was curious how the humour of calling a scuttle "kettle" had evaporated.

That document, I take it, was the end of Mr. Lewisham's informal honeymoon. Its advent was the snap of that bright Prince Rupert's drop; and in a moment—Dust. For a glorious week he had lived in the persuasion that life was made of love and mystery, and now he was reminded with singular clearness that it was begotten of a struggle for existence and the Will to Live. "Confounded imposition!" fumed Mr. Lewisham, and the breakfast table was novel and ominous, mutterings towards anger on the one hand and a certain consternation on the other. "I must give her a talking to this

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afternoon," said Lewisham at his watch, and after he had bundled his books into the shiny black bag, he gave the first of his kisses that was not a distinct and self-subsisting ceremony. It was usage and done in a hurry, and the door slammed as he went his way to the schools. Ethel was not coming that morning, because by special request and because she wanted to help him she was going to copy out some of his botanical notes which had fallen into arrears.

On his way to the schools Lewisham felt something suspiciously near a sinking of the heart. His pre-occupation was essentially arithmetical. The thing that engaged his mind to the exclusion of all other matters is best expressed in the recognised business form.

Dr.	£	s.	d.	Cr.	£	s.	d.	
Cash in hand	Mr. L.	13	10	4½	By 'bus fares to South Kensington (late)....			2
	Mrs. L.	11	7		By 6 lunches at the Students' Club.....	5		2½
				By 2 packets of cigarettes (to smoke after dinner).....			6
At Bank		45	0	0	By marriage and elopement.....	4	18	10
To Scholarship		1	1	0	By necessary subsequent additions to bride's trousseau.....	16		1
					By housekeeping exps... 1	1		4½
					By "A few little things" bought by housekeeper.....	15		3½
					By Madam Gadow for coal, lodging and attendance (as per account rendered).....	1	15	0
					By missing.....			4
					By balance.....	50	11	2
		£60.	8	11½		£60.	8	11½

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From this it will be manifest to the most unbusiness-like that, disregarding the extraordinary expenditure on the marriage, and the by no means final "few little things" Ethel had bought, outgoings exceeded income by two pounds and more, and a brief excursion into arithmetic will demonstrate that in five and twenty weeks the balance of the account would be nothing.

But that guinea a week was not to go on for five and twenty weeks, but simply for fifteen, and then the net outgoings will be well over three guineas, reducing the "law" accorded our young couple to two and twenty weeks. These details are tiresome and disagreeable, no doubt, to the refined reader, but just imagine how much more disagreeable they were to Mr. Lewisham, trudging meditative to the schools. You will understand his slipping out of the laboratory and betaking himself to the Educational Reading-room; and how it was that the observant Smithers, grinding his lecture notes against the now imminent second examination for the "Forbes," was presently perplexed to the centre of his being by the spectacle of Lewisham intent upon a pile of current periodicals, the *Educational Times*, the *Journal of Education*, the *Schoolmaster*, *Science and Art*, *The University Correspondent*, *Nature*, *The Athenæum*, *The Academy*, and *The Author*.

Smithers remarked the appearance of a notebook, the jotting down of memoranda. He edged into the bay nearest Lewisham's table and approached him suddenly from the flank. "What are *you* after?" said Smithers in a noisy whisper and with a detective eye on the papers. He perceived Lewisham was

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scrutinising the advertisement columns, and his perplexity increased.

“Oh—nothing,” said Lewisham blandly, with his hand falling casually over his memoranda; “what’s your particular little game?”

“Nothing much,” said Smithers, “just mooching round. You weren’t at the meeting last Friday?”

He turned a chair, knelt on it, and began whispering over the back about Debating Society politics. Lewisham was inattentive and brief. What had he to do with these puerilities? At last Smithers went away foiled, and met Parkson by the entrance. Parkson, by-the-bye, had not spoken to Lewisham since their painful misunderstanding. He made a wide detour to his seat at the end table, and so, and by a singular rectitude of bearing and a dignified expression, showed himself aware of Lewisham’s offensive presence.

Lewisham’s investigations were two-fold. He wanted to discover some way of adding materially to that weekly guinea by his own exertions, and he wanted to learn the conditions of the market for typewriting. For himself he had a vague idea, an idea subsequently abandoned, that it was possible to get teaching work in evening classes during the month of March. But except by reason of sudden death, no evening class in London changes its staff after September until July comes round again. Private tuition, moreover, offered many attractions to him, but no definite proposals. His ideas of his own possibilities were youthful, or he would not have spent time in noting the conditions of application for a vacant professorship in physics at the Mel-

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bourne University. He also made a note of the vacant editorship of a monthly magazine devoted to social questions. He would not have minded doing that sort of thing at all, though the proprietor might. There was also a vacant curatorship in the Museum of Eton College.

The typewriting business was less varied and more definite. Those were the days before the violent competition of the half-educated had brought things down to an impossible tenpence the thousand words, and the prevailing price was as high as one-and-six. Calculating that Ethel could do a thousand words in an hour and that she could work five or six hours in the day, it was evident that her contributions to the household expenses would be by no means despicable; thirty shillings a week perhaps. Lewisham was naturally elated at this discovery. He could find no advertisements of authors or others seeking typewriting, but he saw that a great number of typists advertised themselves in the literary papers. It was evident Ethel also must advertise. "‘Scientific phraseology a specialty’ might be put," meditated Lewisham. He returned to his lodgings in a hopeful mood with quite a bundle of memoranda of possible employment. He spent five shillings upon stamps on the way.

After lunch, Lewisham—a little short of breath—asked to see Madam Gadow. She came up in the most affable frame of mind; nothing could be further from the normal indignation of the British landlady. She was very voluble, gesticulatory and lucid, but unhappily bi-lingual, and at all the crucial

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points German. Mr. Lewisham's natural politeness restrained him from too close a pursuit across the boundary of the two imperial tongues. Quite half an hour's amicable discussion led at last to a reduction of sixpence, and all parties professed themselves satisfied with this result.

Madam Gadow was quite cool even at the end. Mr. Lewisham was flushed in the face, red-eared, and his hair slightly disordered; but that sixpence was at any rate an admission of the justice of his claim. "She was evidently trying it on," he said almost apologetically to Ethel. "It was absolutely necessary to present a firm front to her. I doubt if we shall have any trouble again. . . ."

"Of course what she says about kitchen coals is perfectly just."

Then the young couple went for a walk in Kensington Gardens, and—the spring afternoon was so warm and pleasant—sat on two attractive green chairs near the band-stand, for which Lewisham had subsequently to pay twopence. They had what Ethel called a "serious talk." She was really wonderfully sensible and discussed the situation exhaustively. She was particularly insistent upon the importance of economy in her domestic disbursements and deplored her general ignorance very earnestly. It was decided that Lewisham should get a good elementary textbook of domestic economy for her private study. At home Mrs. Chaffery guided her house by the oracular items of "Inquire Within upon Everything," but Lewisham considered that work unscientific.

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Ethel was also of opinion that much might be learned from the sixpenny ladies' papers—the penny ones had hardly begun in those days. She had bought such publications during seasons of affluence, but chiefly, as she now deplored, with an eye to the trimming of hats and such-like vanities. The sooner the typewriter came the better. It occurred to Lewisham with unpleasant suddenness that he had not allowed for the purchase of a typewriter in his estimate of their resources. It brought their "law" down to twelve or thirteen weeks.

They spent the evening in writing and copying a number of letters, addressing envelopes and enclosing stamps. There were optimistic moments.

"Melbourne's a fine city," said Lewisham, "and we should have a glorious voyage out." He read the application for the Melbourne professorship out loud to her, just to see how it read, and she was greatly impressed by the list of his accomplishments and successes. "I did not know you knew *half* those things," she said, and became depressed at her relative illiteracy. It was natural, after such encouragement, to write to the scholastic agents in a tone of assured consequence.

The advertisement for typewriting in the *Athenæum* troubled his conscience a little. After he had copied out his draft with its "Scientific phraseology a specialty," fine and large, he saw the notes she had written out for him. Her handwriting was still round and boyish, even as it had appeared in the Whortley avenue, but her punctuation was confined to the erratic comma and the dash, and

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there was a disposition to spell the imperfectly legible along the line of least resistance. However, he dismissed that matter with a resolve to read over and correct anything in that way that she might have sent her to do. It would not be a bad idea, he thought parenthetically, if he himself read up some sound authority on the punctuation of sentences.

They sat at this business quite late, heedless of the examination in botany that came on the morrow. It was very bright and cosy in their little room with their fire burning, the gas lit and the curtains drawn, and the number of applications they had written made them hopeful. She was flushed and enthusiastic, now flitting about the room, now coming close to him and leaning over him to see what he had done. At Lewisham's request she got him the envelopes from the chest of drawers. "You *are* a help to a chap," said Lewisham, leaning back from the table. "I feel I could do anything for a girl like you—anything."

"*Really!*" she cried. "Really! Am I really a help?"

Lewisham's face and gesture were all assent. She gave a little cry of delight, stood for a moment, and then by way of practical demonstration of her unflinching helpfulness, hurried round the table towards him with arms extended. "You dear!" she cried.

Lewisham, partially embraced, pushed his chair back with his disengaged arm, so that she might sit on his knee. . . .

Who could doubt that she was a help?

CHAPTER XXV

THE FIRST BATTLE

LEWISHAM'S inquiries for evening teaching and private tuition were essentially provisional measures. His proposals for a more permanent establishment displayed a certain defect in his sense of proportion. That Melbourne professorship, for example, was beyond his merits, and there were aspects of things that would have affected the welcome of himself and his wife at Eton. At the outset he was inclined to regard the South Kensington scholar as the intellectual salt of the earth, to overrate the abundance of "decent things" yielding from one hundred and fifty to three hundred a year, and to disregard the competition of such inferior enterprises as the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and the literate North. But the scholastic agents to whom he went on the following Saturday did much in a quiet way to disabuse his mind.

Mr. Blendershin's chief assistant in the grimy little office in Oxford Street cleared up the matter so vigorously that Lewisham was angered. "Head Master of an endowed school, perhaps!" said Mr. Blendershin's chief assistant. "Lord!—why not a bishopric? I say,"—as Mr. Blendershin entered smoking an assertive cigar—"one and twenty, *no* degree, *no* games, two years' experience as junior—wants a headmastership of an endowed school!" He spoke so loudly that it was inevitable the selec-

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tion of clients in the waiting-room should hear, and he pointed with his pen.

“Look here!” said Lewisham hotly; “if I knew the ways of the market I shouldn’t come to you.”

Mr. Blendershin stared at Lewisham for a moment. “What’s he done in the way of certificates?” asked Mr. Blendershin of the assistant.

The assistant read a list of ’ologies and ’ographies. “Fifty-resident,” said Mr. Blendershin concisely—“that’s *your* figure. Sixty, if you’re lucky.”

“*What?*” said Mr. Lewisham.

“Not enough for you?”

“Not nearly.”

“You can get a Cambridge graduate for eighty resident—and grateful,” said Mr. Blendershin.

“But I don’t want a resident post,” said Lewisham.

“Precious few non-resident shops,” said Mr. Blendershin. “Precious few. They want you for dormitory supervision—and they’re afraid of your taking pups outside.”

“Not married by any chance?” said the assistant suddenly, after an attentive study of Lewisham’s face.

“Well—er.” Lewisham met Mr. Blendershin’s eye. “Yes,” he said.

The assistant was briefly unprintable. “Lord! you’ll have to keep that dark,” said Mr. Blendershin. “But you have got a tough bit of hoeing before you. If I was you I’d go on and get my degree now you’re so near it. You’ll stand a better chance.”

Pause.

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“The fact is,” said Lewisham slowly and looking at his boot toes, “I must be doing *something* while I am getting my degree.”

The assistant whistled softly.

“Might get you a visiting job, perhaps,” said Mr. Blendershin speculatively. “Just read me those items again, Binks.” He listened attentively. “Objects to religious teaching!— Eh?” He stopped the reading by a gesture. “That’s nonsense. You can’t have everything, you know. Scratch that out. You won’t get a place in any middle-class school in England if you object to religious teaching. It’s the mothers—bless ’em! Say nothing about it. Don’t believe—who does? There’s hundreds like you, you know—hundreds. Parsons—all sorts. Say nothing about it——”

“But if I’m asked?”

“Church of England. Every man in this country who has not dissented belongs to the Church of England. It’ll be hard enough to get you anything without that.”

“But—” said Mr. Lewisham. “It’s lying.”

“Legal fiction,” said Mr. Blendershin. “Every one understands. If you don’t do that, my dear chap, we can’t do anything for you. It’s journalism, or London docks. Well, considering your experience,—say docks.”

Lewisham’s face flushed irregularly. He did not answer. He scowled and tugged at the still by no means ample moustache.

“Compromise, you know,” said Mr. Blendershin, watching him kindly. “Compromise.”

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For the first time in his life Lewisham faced the necessity of telling a lie in cold blood. He glissaded from the austere altitudes of his self-respect and his next words were already disingenuous.

"I won't promise to tell lies if I'm asked," he said aloud. "I can't do that."

"Scratch it out," said Blendershin to the clerk. "You needn't mention it. Then you don't say you can teach drawing."

"I can't," said Lewisham.

"You just give out the copies," said Blendershin, "and take care they don't see you draw, you know."

"But that's not teaching drawing——"

"It's what's understood by it in *this* country," said Blendershin. "Don't you go corrupting your mind with pedagogueries. They're the ruin of assistants. Put down drawing. Then there's shorthand——"

"Here, I say!" said Lewisham.

"There's shorthand, French, book-keeping, commercial geography, land measuring——"

"But I can't teach any of those things!"

"Look here," said Blendershin, and paused. "Has your wife or you a private income?"

"No," said Lewisham.

"Well?"

A pause of further moral descent, and a whack against an obstacle. "But they will find me out," said Lewisham.

Blendershin smiled. "It's not so much ability as willingness to teach, you know. And *they* won't find you out. The sort of schoolmaster we deal

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with can't find anything out. He can't teach any of these things himself—and consequently he doesn't believe they *can* be taught. Talk to him of pedagogics and he talks of practical experience. But he puts 'em on his prospectus, you know, and he wants 'em on his time-table. Some of these subjects—There's commercial geography, for instance. What *is* commercial geography?"

"Barilla," said the assistant biting the end of his pen, and added pensively, "*and* blethers."

"Fad," said Blendershin. "Just fad. Newspapers talk rot about commercial education, Duke of Devonshire catches on and talks ditto—pretends he thought of it himself—much *he* cares—parents get hold of it—schoolmasters obliged to put something down, consequently assistants must. And that's the end of the matter!"

"*All* right," said Lewisham catching his breath in a faint sob of shame. "Stick 'em down. But mind—a non-resident place."

"Well," said Blendershin, "your science may pull you through. But I tell you it's hard. Some grant-earning grammar school may want that. And that's about all, I think. Make a note of the address. . . ."

The assistant made a noise, something between a whistle and the word "Fee." Blendershin glanced at Lewisham and nodded doubtfully.

"Fee for booking," said the assistant; "half a crown. Postage—in advance—half a crown."

But Lewisham remembered certain advice Dunkerley had given him in the old Whortley days. He hesitated. "No," he said. "I don't pay that."

THE FIRST BATTLE

If you get me anything there's the commission—if you don't——”

“We lose,” supplied the assistant.

“And you ought to,” said Lewisham. “It's a fair game.”

“Living in London?” asked Blendershin.

“Yes,” said the clerk.

“That's all right,” said Mr. Blendershin. “We won't say anything about the postage in that case. Of course it's the off season, and you mustn't expect anything at present very much. Sometimes there's a shift or so at Easter. . . . There's nothing more. . . . Afternoon. Any one else, Binks?”

Messrs. Maskelyne, Smith and Thrums did a higher class of work than Blendershin, whose specialties were lower-class private establishments and the cheaper sort of endowed schools. Indeed, so superior were Maskelyne, Smith and Thrums that they enraged Lewisham by refusing at first to put him on their books. He was interviewed briefly by a young man dressed and speaking with offensive precision, whose eye adhered rigidly to the waterproof collar throughout the interview.

“Hardly our line,” he said, and pushed Lewisham a form to fill up. “Mostly upper class and good preparatory schools here, you know.”

As Lewisham filled up the form with his multitudinous “ologies” and “ographies,” a youth of ducal appearance entered and greeted the precise young man in a friendly way. Lewisham, bending down to write, perceived that this professional rival wore a very long frock coat, patent leather boots,

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and the most beautiful grey trousers. His conceptions of competition enlarged. The precise young man by a motion of his eyes directed the new-comer's attention to Lewisham's waterproof collar, and was answered by raised eyebrows and a faint tightening of the mouth. "That bouncer at Castleford has answered me," said the new-comer in a fine rich voice. "Is he any bally good?"

When the bouncer at Castleford had been discussed Lewisham presented his paper, and the precise young man with his eye still fixed on the waterproof collar took the document in the manner of one who reaches across a gulf. "I doubt if we shall be able to do anything for you," he said reassuringly. "But an English mastership may chance to be vacant. Science doesn't count for much in *our* sort of schools, you know. Classics and good games—that's our sort of thing."

"I see," said Lewisham.

"Good games, good form, you know, and all that sort of thing."

"I see," said Lewisham.

"You don't happen to be a public-school boy?" asked the precise young man.

"No," said Lewisham.

"Where were you educated?"

Lewisham's face grew hot. "Does that matter?" he asked with his eye on the exquisite grey trousering.

"In our sort of school—decidedly. It's a question of tone, you know."

"I see," said Lewisham, beginning to realise

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new limitations. His immediate impulse was to escape the eye of the nicely dressed assistant master. "You'll write, I suppose, if you have anything," he said, and the precise young man responded with alacrity to his doorward motion.

"Often get that kind of thing?" asked the nicely dressed young man when Lewisham had departed.

"Rather. Not quite so bad as that, you know. That waterproof collar—did you notice it? Ugh! And—'I see.' And the scowl and the clumsiness of it. Of course *he* hasn't any decent clothes—he'd go to a new shop with one tin box! But that sort of thing—and boardschool teachers—they're getting everywhere! Only the other day—Rowton was here."

"Not Rowton of Pinner?"

"Yes, Rowton of Pinner. And he asked right out for a boardschool master. He said, 'I want some one who can teach arithmetic.'"

He laughed. The nicely dressed young man meditated over the handle of his cane. "A bounder of that kind can't have a particularly nice time," he said, "anyhow. If he does get into a decent school, he must get tremendously cut by all the decent men."

"Too thick-skinned to mind that sort of thing, I fancy," said the scholastic agent. "He's a new type. This South Kensington place and the polytechnics are turning him out by the hundred. . . ."

Lewisham forgot his resentment at having to profess a religion he did not believe, in this new discovery of the scholastic importance of clothing.

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He went along with an eye to all the shop windows that afforded a view of his person. Indisputably his trousers *were* ungainly, flapping abominably over his boots and bagging terribly at the knees, and his boots were not only worn and ugly but extremely ill blacked. His wrists projected offensively from his coat sleeves, he perceived a huge asymmetry in the collar of his jacket, his red tie was askew and ill tied, and that waterproof collar! It was shiny, slightly discoloured, suddenly clammy to the neck. What if he did happen to be well equipped for science teaching? That was nothing. He speculated on the cost of a complete outfit. It would be difficult to get such grey trousers as those he had seen for less than sixteen shillings and he reckoned a frock coat at forty shillings at least—possibly even more. He knew good clothes were very expensive. He hesitated at Poole's door and turned away. The thing was out of the question. He crossed Leicester Square and went down Bedford Street disliking every well-dressed person he met.

Messrs. Danks & Wimborne inhabited a bank-like establishment near Chancery Lane, and without any conversation presented him with forms to fill up. Religion? asked the form. Lewisham paused and wrote "Church of England."

Thence he went to the College of Pedagogues in Holborn. The College of Pedagogues presented itself as a long-bearded, corpulent, comfortable person with a thin gold watch chain and fat hands. He wore gilt glasses and had a kindly confidential manner that did much to heal Lewisham's wounded

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feelings. The 'ologies and 'ographies were taken down with polite surprise at their number. "You ought to take one of our diplomas," said the stout man. "You would find no difficulty. No competition. And there are prizes—several prizes—in money."

Lewisham was not aware that the waterproof collar had found a sympathetic observer.

"We give courses of lectures, and have an examination in the theory and practice of education. It is the only examination in the theory and practice of education for men engaged in middle and upper class teaching in this country. Except the Teacher's Diploma. And so few come—not two hundred a year. Mostly governesses. The men prefer to teach by rule of thumb, you know. English characteristic—rule of thumb. It doesn't do to say anything of course—but there's bound to be—something happen—something a little disagreeable—someday, if things go on as they do. American schools keep on getting better—German too. What used to do won't do now. I tell this to you, you know, but it doesn't do to tell every one. It doesn't do. It doesn't do to do anything. So much has to be considered. However . . . But you'd do well to get a diploma and make yourself efficient. Though that's looking ahead."

He spoke of looking ahead with an apologetic laugh as though it was an amiable weakness of his. He turned from such abstruse matters and furnished Lewisham with the particulars of the college diplomas, and proceeded to other possibilities. "There's

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private tuition," he said. "Would you mind a backward boy? Then we are occasionally asked for visiting masters. Mostly by girls' schools. But that's for older men—married men, you know."

"I am married," said Lewisham.

"*Eh?*" said the College of Pedagogues, startled.

"*I am* married," said Lewisham.

"Dear me," said the College of Pedagogues gravely, and regarding Mr. Lewisham over gold-rimmed glasses. "Dear me! And I am more than twice your age, and I am not married at all. One and twenty! Have you—have you been married long?"

"A few weeks," said Lewisham.

"That's very remarkable," said the College of Pedagogues. "Very interesting. . . . *Really!* Your wife must be a very courageous young person. . . . Excuse me! You know— You will really have a hard fight for a position. However—it certainly makes you eligible for girls' schools; it does do that. To a certain extent, that is."

The evidently enhanced respect of the College of Pedagogues pleased Lewisham extremely. But his encounter with the Medical, Scholastic and Clerical Agency that holds by Waterloo Bridge was depressing again, and after that he set out to walk home. Long before he reached home he was tired, and his simple pride in being married and in active grapple with an unsympathetic world had passed. His surrender on the religious question had left a rankling bitterness behind it; the problem of the clothes was acutely painful. He was still far from a firm grasp

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of the fact that his market price was under rather than over one hundred pounds a year, but that persuasion was gaining ground in his mind.

The day was a greyish one, with a dull cold wind, and a nail in one of his boots took upon itself to be objectionable. Certain wild shots and disastrous lapses in his recent botanical examination, that he had managed to keep out of his mind hitherto, forced their way on his attention. For the first time since his marriage he harboured premonitions of failure.

When he got in he wanted to sit down at once in the little creaky chair by the fire, but Ethel came flitting from the newly bought typewriter with arms extended and prevented him. "Oh!—it *has* been dull," she said.

He missed the compliment. "I haven't had such a giddy time that you should grumble," he said, in a tone that was novel to her. He disengaged himself from her arms and sat down. He noticed the expression of her face.

"I'm rather tired," he said by way of apology. "And there's a confounded nail I must hammer down in my boot. It's tiring work hunting up these agents, but of course it's better to go and see them. How have you been getting on?"

"All right," she said regarding him. And then, "You *are* tired. We'll have some tea. And—let me take off your boot for you, dear. Yes—I will."

She rang the bell, bustled out of the room, called for tea at the staircase, came back, pulled out Madam Gadow's ungainly hassock and began unlac-

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ing his boot. Lewisham's mood changed. "You *are* a trump, Ethel," he said; "I'm hanged if you're not." As the laces flicked he bent forward and kissed her ear. The unlacing was suspended and there were reciprocal endearments. . . .

Presently he was sitting in his slippers, with a cup of tea in his hand, and Ethel, kneeling on the hearthrug with the firelight on her face, was telling him of an answer that had come that afternoon to her advertisement in the *Athenæum*.

"That's good," said Lewisham.

"It's a novelist," she said with the light of pride in her eyes, and handed him the letter. "Lucas Holderness, the author of 'The Furnace of Sin' and other stories."

"That's first rate," said Lewisham with just a touch of envy, and bent forward to read by the firelight.

The letter was from an address in Judd Street, Euston Road, written on good paper and in a fair round hand such as one might imagine a novelist using. "Dear Madam," said the letter; "I propose to send you, by registered letter, the MS. of a three-volume novel. It is about 90,000 words—but you must count the exact number."

"How I shall count I don't know," said Ethel.

"I'll show you a way," said Lewisham. "There's no difficulty in that. You count the words on three or four pages, strike an average, and multiply."

"But of course, before doing so I must have a satisfactory guarantee that my confidence in putting my work in your hands will not be misplaced and

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that your execution is of the necessary high quality.”

“Oh!” said Lewisham; “that’s a bother.”

“Accordingly I must ask you for references.”

“That’s a downright nuisance,” said Lewisham. “I suppose that ass Lagune . . . But what’s this? ‘Or, failing references, for a deposit . . .’ That’s reasonable, I suppose.”

It was such a moderate deposit too—merely a guinea. Even had the doubt been stronger, the aspect of helpful hopeful little Ethel eager for work might well have thrust it aside. “Sending him a cheque will show him we have a banking account behind us,” said Lewisham,—his banking was still sufficiently recent for pride. “We will send him a cheque. That’ll settle *him* all right.”

That evening after the guinea cheque had been despatched, things were further brightened by the arrival of a letter of atrociously jellygraphed advices from Messrs. Danks & Wimborne. They all referred to resident vacancies for which Lewisham was manifestly unsuitable, nevertheless their arrival brought an encouraging assurance of things going on, of shifting and unstable places in the defences of the beleaguered world. Afterwards, with occasional endearments for Ethel, he set himself to a revision of his last year’s notebooks, for now the botany was finished, the advanced zoological course—the last lap, as it were, for the Forbes medal—was beginning. She got her best hat from the next room to make certain changes in the arrangement of its trimming. She sat in the little chair, while Lewis-

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ham, with documents spread before him, sat at the table.

Presently she looked up from an experimental arrangement of her cornflowers, and discovered Lewisham no longer reading, but staring blankly at the middle of the tablecloth with an extraordinary misery in his eyes. She forgot the cornflowers and stared at him.

“Penny,” she said after an interval.

Lewisham started and looked up. “*Eh?*”

“Why were you looking so miserable?” she asked.

“*Was* I looking miserable?”

“Yes. And *cross!*”

“I was thinking just then that I would like to boil a bishop or so in oil.”

“My dear!”

“They know perfectly well the case against what they teach, they know it’s neither madness nor wickedness nor any great harm to others, not to believe, they know perfectly well that a man may be as honest as the day, and right—right and decent in every way—and not believe in what they teach. And they know that it only wants the edge off a man’s honour, for him to profess anything in the way of belief. Just anything. And they won’t say so. I suppose they want the edge off every man’s honour. If a man is well off they will truckle to him no end, though he laughs at all their teaching. They’ll take gold plate from company promoters and rent from insanitary houses. But if a man is poor and doesn’t profess to believe in what some of them scarcely believe themselves, they wouldn’t lift

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a finger to help him against the ignorance of their followers. Your stepfather was right enough there. They know what's going on. They know that it means lying and humbug for any number of people, and they don't care. Why should they? *They've* got it down all right. They're spoiled and why shouldn't we be?"

Lewisham having selected the bishops as scapegoats for his turpitude, was inclined to ascribe even the nail in his boot to their agency.

Mrs. Lewisham looked puzzled. She realised his drift.

"You're not," she said, and dropped her voice, "an *infidel*?"

Lewisham nodded gloomily. "Aren't you?" he said.

"Oh no," said Mrs. Lewisham.

"But you don't go to church, you don't ——"

"No, I don't," said Mrs. Lewisham; and then with more assurance, "But I'm not an infidel."

"Christian?"

"I suppose so."

"But a Christian— What do you believe?"

"Oh! to tell the truth, and do right, and not hurt or injure people and all that."

"That's not a Christian. A Christian is one who believes."

"It's what *I* mean by a Christian," said Mrs. Lewisham.

"Oh! at that rate any one's a Christian," said Lewisham. "We all think it's right to do right and wrong to do wrong."

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“But we don’t all do it,” said Mrs. Lewisham, taking up the cornflowers again.

“No,” said Lewisham, a little taken aback by the feminine method of discussion. “We don’t all do it—certainly.” He stared at her for a moment—her head was a little on one side and her eyes on the cornflowers—and his mind was full of a strange discovery. He seemed on the verge of speaking, and turned to his notebook again.

Very soon the centre of the tablecloth resumed its sway.

The following day Mr. Lucas Holderness received his cheque for a guinea. Unhappily it was crossed. He meditated for some time and then took pen and ink and improved Lewisham’s careless “one” to “five” and touched up his unticked figure one to correspond.

You perceive him, a lank, cadaverous, good-looking man with long black hair and a semi-clerical costume of quite painful rustiness. He made the emendations with grave carefulness. He took the cheque round to his grocer. His grocer looked at it suspiciously.

“You pay it in,” said Mr. Lucas Holderness, “if you’ve any doubts about it. Pay it in. *I* don’t know the man or what he is. He may be a swindler for all I can tell. *I* can’t answer for him. Pay it in and see. Leave the change till then. *I* can wait. *I*’ll call round in a few days’ time.”

“All right, wasn’t it?” said Mr. Lucas Holderness in a casual tone two days later.

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“Quite, sir,” said his grocer with enhanced respect, and handed him his four pounds thirteen and sixpence change.

Mr. Lucas Holderness, who had been eyeing the grocer's stock with a curious intensity, immediately became animated and bought a tin of salmon. He went out of the shop with the rest of the money in his hand, for the pockets of his clothes were old and untrustworthy. At the baker's he bought a new roll.

He bit a huge piece of the roll directly he was out of the shop, and went on his way gnawing. It was so large a piece that his gnawing mouth was contorted into the ugliest shapes. He swallowed by an effort, stretching his neck each time. His eyes expressed an animal satisfaction. He turned the corner of Judd Street biting again at the roll, and the reader of this story, like the Lewishams, hears of him no more.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE GLAMOUR FADES

AFTER all, the rosy love-making and marrying and Epithalamy are no more than the dawn of things, and to follow comes all the spacious interval of white laborious light. Try as we may to stay those delightful moments, they fade and pass remorselessly; there is no returning, no recovering, only—for the foolish—the vilest peep-shows and imitations in dens and darkened rooms. We go on—we grow. At least we age. Our young couple, emerging presently from an atmosphere of dusk and morning stars, found the sky gathering greyly overhead and saw one another for the first time clearly in the light of every day.

It might perhaps witness better to Lewisham's refinement if one could tell only of a moderated and dignified cooling, of pathetic little concealments of disappointment and a decent maintenance of the sentimental atmosphere. And so at last daylight. But our young couple were too crude for that. The first intimations of their lack of identity have already been described, but it would be tedious and pitiful to tell of all the little intensifications, shade by shade, of the conflict of their individualities. They fell out, dear lady! they came to conflict of words. The stress of perpetual worry was upon them, of dwindling funds and the anxious search for work that would not come. And on Ethel lay long, vacant, lonely hours in dull surroundings. Differences arose from the most indifferent things; one

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night Lewisham lay awake in unfathomable amazement because she had convinced him she did not care a rap for the Welfare of Humanity, and deemed his Socialism a fancy and an indiscretion. And one Sunday afternoon they started for a walk under the pleasantest auspices, and returned flushed and angry, satire and retort flying free—on the score of the social conventions in Ethel's novelettes. For some inexplicable reason Lewisham saw fit to hate her novelettes very bitterly. These encounters indeed were mere skirmishes for the most part, and the silences and embarrassments that followed ended sooner or later in a "making up," tacit or definite, though once or twice this making up only re-opened the healing wound. And always each skirmish left its scar, effaced from yet another line of their lives the lingering tints of romantic colour.

There came no work, no added income for either of them, saving two trifles, for five long months. Once Lewisham won twelve shillings in the prize competition of a penny weekly, and three times came infinitesimal portions of typewriting from a poet who had apparently seen the *Athenæum* advertisement. His name was Edwin Peak Baynes and his handwriting was sprawling and unformed. He sent her several short lyrics on scraps of paper with instructions that he desired "three copies of each written beautifully in different styles" and "not fastened with metal fasteners but with silk thread of an appropriate colour." Both of our young people were greatly exercised by these instructions. One fragment was called "Bird Song," one "Cloud

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Shadows," and one "Eryngium," but Lewisham thought they might be spoken of collectively as Bosh. By way of payment, this poet sent, in contravention of the postal regulations, half a sovereign stuck into a card, asking her to keep the balance against future occasions. In a little while, greatly altered copies of these lyrics were returned by the poet in person, with this enigmatical instruction written across the cover of each: "This style I like, only if possible more so."

Lewisham was out, but Ethel opened the door, so this endorsement was unnecessary. "He's really only a boy," said Ethel, describing the interview to Lewisham, who was curious. They both felt that the youthfulness of Edwin Peak Baynes detracted something from the reality of this employment.

From his marriage until the final examination in June, Lewisham's life had an odd amphibious quality. At home were Ethel and the perpetual aching pursuit of employment, the pelting irritations of Madame Gadow's persistent overcharges, and so forth, and amid such things he felt extraordinarily grown up; but intercalated with these experiences were those intervals at Kensington, scraps of his adolescence, as it were, lying amidst the new matter of his manhood, intervals during which he was simply an insubordinate and disappointing student with an increasing disposition to gossip. At South Kensington he dwelt with theories and ideals as a student should; at the little rooms in Chelsea—they grew very stuffy as the summer came on, and the accumulation of the penny novelettes Ethel favoured made

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a litter—there was his particular private concrete situation, and ideals gave place to the real.

It was a strangely narrow world, he perceived dimly, in which his manhood opened. The only visitors were the Chafferys. Chaffery would come to share their supper, and won upon Lewisham in spite of his roguery by his incessantly entertaining monologue and by his expressed respect for and envy of Lewisham's scientific attainments. Moreover, as time went on Lewisham found himself more and more in sympathy with Chaffery's bitterness against those who order the world. It was good to hear him on bishops and that sort of people. He said what Lewisham wanted to say, beautifully. Mrs. Chaffery was perpetually flitting out of the house as Lewisham came home, a dim, black, nervous, untidy little figure. She came because Ethel, in spite of her expressed belief that love was "all in all," found married life a little dull and lonely while Lewisham was away. And she went hastily when he came, because of a certain irritability that the struggle against the world was developing. He told no one at Kensington about his marriage, at first because it was such a delicious secret and then for quite other reasons. So there was no overlapping. The two worlds began and ended sharply at the wrought-iron gates. But the day came when Lewisham passed those gates for the last time and his adolescence ended altogether.

In the final examination of the biological course, the examination that signalled the end of his income of a weekly guinea, he knew well enough that

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he had done badly. The evening of the last day's practical work found him belated, hot-headed, beaten, with ruffled hair and red ears. He sat to the last moment doggedly struggling to keep cool and to mount the ciliated funnel of an earthworm's nephridium. But ciliated funnels come not to those who have shirked the laboratory practice. He rose, surrendered his paper to the morose elderly young assistant demonstrator who had welcomed him so flatteringly eight months before, and walked down the laboratory to the door where the rest of his fellow-students clustered.

Smithers was talking loudly about the "twistiness" of the identification, and the youngster with the big ears was listening attentively.

"Here's Lewisham! How did *you* get on, Lewisham?" asked Smithers, not concealing his assurance.

"Horribly," said Lewisham shortly, and pushed past.

"Did you spot D?" clamoured Smithers.

Lewisham pretended not to hear.

Miss Heydinger stood with her hat in her hand and looked at Lewisham's hot eyes. He was for walking past her, but something in her face penetrated even his disturbance. He stopped.

"Did you get out the nephridium?" he said as graciously as he could.

She shook her head. "Are you going downstairs?" she asked.

"Rather," said Lewisham with a vague intimation in his manner of the offence Smithers gave him.

He opened the glass door from the passage to the

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staircase. They went down one tier of that square spiral in silence.

“Are you coming up again next year,” asked Miss Heydinger.

“No,” said Lewisham. “No, I shall not come here again. Ever.”

Pause. “What will you do?” she asked.

“I don’t know. I have to get a living somehow. It’s been bothering me all the session.”

“I thought—” She stopped. “Will you go down to your uncle’s again?” she said.

“No. I shall stop in London. It’s no good going out of things into the country. And besides—I’ve quarrelled rather with my uncle.”

“What do you think of doing?—teaching?”

“I suppose it will be teaching. I’m not sure. Anything that turns up.”

“I see,” she said.

They went on down in silence for a time.

“I suppose you will come up again?” he asked.

“I may try the botanical again—if they can find room. And, I was thinking—sometimes one hears of things. What is your address? So that if I heard of anything——”

Lewisham stopped on the staircase and thought. “Of course,” he said. He made no effort to give her the address, and she demanded it again at the foot of the stairs.

“That confounded nephridium—!” he said. “It has put everything out of my head.”

They exchanged addresses on leaflets torn from Miss Heydinger’s little notebook.

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She waited at the Book in the hall while he signed his name. At the iron gates of the Schools she said: "I am going through Kensington Gardens."

He was now feeling irritated about the addresses, and he would not see the implicit invitation. "I am going towards Chelsea."

She hesitated a moment, looking at him—puzzled. "Good-bye then," she said.

"Good-bye," he answered, lifting his hat.

He crossed the Exhibition Road slowly with his packed glazed bag, now seamed with cracks, in his hand. He went thoughtfully down to the corner of the Cromwell Road and turned along that to the right so that he could see the red pile of the Science Schools rising fair and tall across the gardens of the Natural History Museum. He looked back towards it regretfully.

He was quite sure that he had failed in this last examination. He knew that any career as a scientific man was now closed to him for ever. And he remembered now how he had come along this very road to that great building for the first time in his life, and all the hopes and resolves that had swelled within him as he had drawn near. That dream of incessant unswerving work! Where might he have reached if only he had had singleness of purpose to make it a reality? . . .

And in these gardens it was that he and Smithers and Parkson had sat on a seat hard by the fossil tree and discoursed of Socialism together before the great paper was read. . . .

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“Yes,” he said, speaking aloud to himself; “yes —*that’s* all over too. Everything’s over.”

Presently the corner of the Natural History Museum came between him and his receding Alma Mater. He sighed and turned his face towards the stuffy little rooms at Chelsea, and the still unconquered world.

CHAPTER XXVII

CONCERNING A QUARREL

It was late in September that this particular quarrel occurred. Almost all the roseate tints seemed gone by this time, for the Lewishams had been married six months. Their financial affairs had changed from the catastrophic to the sordid; Lewisham had found work. An army crammer named Captain Vigours wanted some one energetic for his mathematical duffers, and to teach geometrical drawing and what he was pleased to call "Sandhurst Science." He paid no less than two shillings an hour for his uncertain demands on Lewisham's time. Moreover, there was a class in lower mathematics beginning at Walham Green where Lewisham was to show his quality. Fifty shillings a week or more seemed credible—more might be hoped for. It was now merely a case of tiding over the interval until Vigours paid. And meanwhile the freshness of Ethel's blouses departed, and Lewisham refrained from the repair of his boot, which had cracked across the toe.

The beginning of the quarrel was trivial enough. But by the end they got to generalities. Lewisham had begun the day in a bad temper and under the cloud of an overnight passage of arms—and a little incident that had nothing to do with their ostensible difference lent it a warmth of emotion quite beyond its merits. As he emerged through the folding doors

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he saw a letter lying among the sketchily laid breakfast things, and Ethel's attitude suggested the recoil of a quick movement; the letter suddenly dropped. Her eyes met his and she flushed. He sat down and took the letter—a trifle awkwardly perhaps. It was from Miss Heydinger. He hesitated with it half-way to his pocket, then decided to open it. It displayed an ample amount of reading, and he read. On the whole he thought it rather a dull sort of letter, but he did not allow this to appear. When it was read he put it carefully in his pocket.

That formally had nothing to do with the quarrel. The breakfast was already over when the quarrel began. Lewisham's morning was vacant, and he proposed to occupy it in the revision of certain notes bearing upon "Sandhurst Science." Unhappily the search for his notebook brought him into collision with the accumulation of Ethel's novelettes.

"These things are everywhere," he said after a gust of vehement handling. "I *wish* you'd tidy them up sometimes."

"They were tidy enough till you began to throw them about," Ethel pointed out.

"Confounded muck! it's only fit to be burned," Lewisham remarked to the universe, and pitched one viciously into the corner.

"Well, you tried to write one, anyhow," said Ethel, recalling a certain "Mammoth" packet of note-paper that had come on an evil end before Lewisham found his industrial level. This reminiscence always irritated him exceedingly.

"Eh?" he said sharply.

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"You tried to write one," repeated Ethel—a little unwillingly.

"You don't mean me to forget that."

"It's you reminded me."

He stared hostility for a space.

"Well, the things make a beastly litter anyhow, there isn't a tidy corner anywhere in the room. There never is."

"That's just the sort of thing you always say."

"Well—*is* there?"

"Yes, there is."

"*Where?*"

Ethel professed not to hear. But a devil had possession of Lewisham for a time. "It isn't as though you had anything else to do," he remarked, wounding dishonourably.

Ethel turned. "If I *put* those things away," she said with tremendous emphasis on the "*put*," "you'd only say I'd hidden them. What *is* the good of trying to please you?"

The spirit of perversity suggested to Lewisham, "None apparently."

Ethel's cheeks glowed and her eyes were bright with unshed tears. Abruptly she abandoned the defensive and blurted out the thing that had been latent so long between them. Her voice took a note of passion. "Nothing I can do ever does please you, since that Miss Heydinger began to write to you."

There was a pause, a gap. Something like astonishment took them both. Hitherto it had been a convention that she knew nothing of the existence of Miss Heydinger. He saw a light. "How did

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you know?" he began, and perceived that line was impossible. He took the way of the natural man; he ejaculated an "Ugh!" of vast disgust, he raised his voice. "You *are* unreasonable!" he cried in angry remonstrance. "Fancy saying that! As though you ever tried to please me! Just as though it wasn't all the other way about!" He stopped—struck by a momentary perception of injustice. He plunged at the point he had shirked. "How did you know it *was* Miss Heydinger——?"

Ethel's voice took upon itself the quality of tears. "I wasn't *meant* to know, was I?" she said.

"But how?"

"I suppose you think it doesn't concern me? I suppose you think I'm made of stone."

"You mean—you think——?"

"Yes—I *do*."

For a brief interval Lewisham stared at the issue she had laid bare. He sought some crushing proposition, some line of convincing reasoning, with which to overwhelm and hide this new aspect of things. It would not come. He found himself fenced in on every side. A surging, irrational rage seized upon him.

"Jealousy!" he cried. "Jealousy! Just as though— Can't I have letters about things you don't understand—that you *won't* understand? If I asked you to read them you wouldn't— It's just because——"

"You never give me a *chance* to understand."

"Don't I?"

"No!"

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“Why!—At first I was always trying. Socialism, religion—all those things. But you don’t care—you won’t care. You won’t have that I’ve thought over these things at all, that I care for these things! It wasn’t any *good* to argue. You just care for me in a way—and all the rest of me—doesn’t matter! And because I’ve got a friend . . .”

“Friend!”

“Yes—*friend!*”

“Why!—you hide her letters!”

“Because I tell you you wouldn’t understand what they are about. But, pah! I won’t argue. I *won’t!* You’re jealous and there’s the end of the matter!”

“Well, who *wouldn’t* be jealous?”

He stared at her as if he found the question hard to see. The theme was difficult—invincibly difficult. He surveyed the room for a diversion. The notebook he had disinterred from her novelettes lay upon the table and reminded him of his grievance of ruined hours. His rage exploded. He struck out abruptly towards fundamental things. He gesticulated forcibly. “This can’t go on!” he cried, “this can’t go on! How can I work? How can I do anything?”

He made three steps and stood in a clear space.

“I won’t *stand* it—I won’t go on at this! Quarrels—bickerings—discomfort. Look there! I meant to work this morning. I meant to look up notes! Instead of which you start a quarrel——”

The gross injustice raised Ethel’s voice to an outcry. “*I* didn’t start the quarrel——”

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The only response to this was to shout, and Lewisham shouted. "You start a quarrel!" he repeated. "You make a shindy! You spring a dispute—jealousy!—on me! How can I do anything? How can one stop in a house like this? I shall go out. Look here!—I shall go out. I shall go to Kensington and work there!"

He perceived himself wordless, and Ethel was about to speak. He glared about him, seeking a prompt climax. Instant action was necessary. He perceived Huxley's "Vertebrata" upon the side-table. He clutched it, swaying it through a momentous arc, and hurled it violently into the empty fireplace.

For a second he seemed to be seeking some other missile. He perceived his hat on the chest of drawers, seized it and strode tragically from the room.

He hesitated with the door half closed, then opened it wide and slammed it vehemently. Thereby the world was warned of the justice of his rage, and so he passed with credit into the street.

He went striding heedless of his direction through the streets dotted with intent people hurrying to work, and presently habit turned his feet towards the Brompton Road. The eastward trend of the morning traffic caught him. For a time, save for a rebellious ingredient of wonder at the back of his mind, he kept his anger white and pure. Why had he married her? was the text to which he clung. Why in the name of destiny had he married her? But anyhow he had said the decisive thing. He would not stand it! It must end. Things were intolerable and they must end. He meditated dev-

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astating things that he might presently say to her in pursuance of this resolution. He contemplated acts of cruelty. In such ways he would demonstrate clearly that he would not stand it. He was very careful to avoid inquiring what it was he would not stand.

How in the name of destiny had he come to marry her? The quality of his surroundings mingled in some way with the quality of his thoughts. The huge distended buildings of corrugated iron in which the Art Museum (of all places!) culminates, the truncated Oratory all askew to the street, seemed to have a similar quarrel with fate. How in the name of destiny? After such high prolusions!

He found that his thoughts had carried him past the lodge of the museum. He turned back irritably and went through the turnstile. He entered the museum and passed beneath the gallery of Old Iron on his way to the Education Library. The vacant array of tables, the bays of attendant books had a quality of refuge. . . .

So much for Lewisham in the morning. Long before midday all the vigour of his wrath was gone, all his passionate conviction of Ethel's unworthiness. Over a pile of neglected geological works he presented a face of gloom. His memory presented a picture of himself as noisy, overbearing, and unfair. What on earth had it all been about?

By two o'clock he was on his way to Vigours', and his mood was acute remorse. Of the transition there can be no telling in words, for thoughts are more subtle than words and emotions infinitely vaguer.

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But one thing at least is definite, that a memory returned.

It drifted in to him, through the glass roof of the Library far above. He did not perceive it as a memory at first, but as an irritating obstacle to attention. He struck the open pages of the book before him with his flat hand. "Damn that infernal hurdy-gurdy!" he whispered.

Presently he made a fretful movement and put his hands over his ears.

Then he thrust his books from him, got up, and wandered about the Library. The organ came to an abrupt end in the middle of a bar, and vanished in the circumambient silence of space.

Lewisham standing in a bay closed a book with a snap and returned to his seat.

Presently he found himself humming a languid tune, and thinking again of the quarrel that he had imagined banished from his mind. What in the name of destiny had it all been about? He had a curious sense that something had got loose, was sliding about in his mind. And as if by way of answer emerged a vision of Whortley—a singularly vivid vision. It was moonlight and a hillside, the little town lay lit and warm below, and the scene was set to music, a lugubriously sentimental air. For some reason this music had the quality of a barrel organ—though he knew that properly it came from a band—and it associated with itself a mystical formula of words, drawling words:—

"Sweet dreamland fa—ces passing to and fro,
Bring back to mem'ry, days of long ago—oh!"

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This air not only reproduced the picture with graphic vividness, but it trailed after it an enormous cloud of irrational emotion, emotion that had but a moment before seemed gone for ever from his being.

He recalled it all! He had come down that hillside and Ethel had been with him. . . .

Had he really felt like that about her?

“Pah!” he said suddenly and reverted to his books.

But the tune and the memory had won their footing, they were with him through his meagre lunch of milk and scones—he had resolved at the outset he would not go back to her for the midday meal—and on his way to Vigours’ they insisted on attention. It may be that lunching on scone and milk does in itself make for milder ways of thinking. A sense of extraordinary contradiction, of infinite perplexity, came to him.

“But then,” he asked, “how the devil did we get to *this*?”

Which is indeed one of the fundamental questions of matrimony.

The morning tumults had given place to an almost scientific calm. Very soon he was grappling manfully with the question. There was no disputing it, they had quarrelled. Not once but several times lately they had quarrelled. It was real quarrelling;—they had stood up against one another, striking, watching to strike, seeking to wound. He tried to recall just how things had gone—what he had said and what she had replied. He could not do it. He had forgotten phrases and connections.

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It stood in his memory not as a sequence of events but as a collection of disconnected static sayings; each saying blunt, permanent, inconsecutive like a graven inscription. And of the scene there came only one picture—Ethel with a burning face and her eyes shining with tears.

The traffic of a cross street engaged him for a space. He emerged on the further side full of the vivid contrast of their changed relations. He made a last effort to indict her, to show that she was entirely to blame for the transition. She had quarrelled with him, she had quarrelled deliberately because she was jealous. She was jealous of Miss Heydinger because she was stupid. But now these accusations faded like smoke as he put them forth. But the picture of two little figures back there in the moonlit past did not fade. It was in the narrows of Kensington High Street that he abandoned her arraignment. It was beyond the Town Hall that he made the new step. Was it, after all, just possible that in some degree he himself rather was the chief person to blame?

It was instantly as if he had been aware of that all the time.

Once he had made that step, he moved swiftly. Not a hundred paces before the struggle was over, and he had plunged headlong into the blue abyss of remorse. And all these things that had been so dramatic and forcible, all the vivid brutal things he had said, stood no longer graven inscriptions but in letters of accusing flame. He tried to imagine he had not said them, that his memory played him

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a trick, tried to suppose he had said something similar perhaps but much less forcible. He attempted with almost equal futility to minimise his own wounds. His endeavour served only to measure the magnitude of his fall.

He had recovered everything now, he saw it all. He recalled Ethel sunlit in the avenue, Ethel white in the moonlight before they parted outside the Frobisher house, Ethel as she would come out of Lagune's house greeting him for their nightly walk, Ethel new wedded, as she came to him through the folding doors radiant in the splendour his emotions threw about her. And at last Ethel angry, dishevelled and tear-stained in that ill-lit, untidy little room. All to the cadence of a hurdy-gurdy tune! From that to this! How had it been possible to get from such an opalescent dawning to such a dismal day? What was it had gone? He and she were the same two persons who walked so brightly in his awakened memory; he and she who had lived so bitterly through the last few weeks of misery!

His mood sank for a space to the quality of groaning. He implicated her now at most as his partner in their failure—"What a mess we have made of things!" was his new motif. "What a mess!"

He knew love now for what it was, knew it for something more ancient and more imperative than reason. He knew now that he loved her, and his recent rage, his hostility, his condemnation of her seemed to him the reign of some exterior influence in his mind. He thought incredulously of the long decline in tenderness that had followed the first

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days of their delight in each other, the diminution of endearment, the first yielding to irritability, the evenings he had spent doggedly working, resisting all his sense of her presence. "One cannot always be love-making," he had said, and so—they were slipping apart. Then in countless little things he had not been patient, he had not been fair. He had wounded her by harshness, by unsympathetic criticism, above all by his absurd secrecy about Miss Heydinger's letters. Why on earth had he kept those letters from her? as though there was something to hide! What was there to hide? What possible antagonism could there be? Yet it was by such little things that their love was now like some once valued possession that had been in brutal hands, it was scratched and chipped and tarnished, it was on its way to being altogether destroyed. Her manner had changed towards him, a gulf was opening that he might never be able to close again.

"No, it *shall* not be!" he said, "it shall not be!"

But how to get back to the old footing? how to efface the things he had said, the things that had been done?

Could they get back?

For a moment he faced a new possibility. Suppose they could not get back! Suppose the mischief was done! Suppose that when he slammed the door behind him it locked, and was locked against him for ever!

"But we *must!*" said Lewisham, "we must!"

He perceived clearly that this was no business of reasoned apologies. He must begin again, he must

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get back to emotion, he must thrust back the overwhelming pressure of every-day stresses and necessities that was crushing all the warmth and colour from their lives. But how? How?

He must make love to her again. But how to begin—how to mark the change? There had been making-up before, sullen concessions and treaties. But this was different. He tried to imagine something he might say, some appeal that he might make. Everything he thought of was cold and hard, or pitiful and undignified, or theatrical and foolish. Suppose the door *was* closed! If already it was too late! In every direction he was confronted by the bristling memories of harsh things. He had a glimpse of how he must have changed in her eyes, and things became intolerable for him. For now he was assured he loved her still with all his heart.

And suddenly came a florist's window, and in the centre of it a glorious heap of roses.

They caught his eye before they caught his mind. He saw white roses, virginal white, roses of cream and pink and crimson, the tints of flesh and pearl, rich, a mass of scented colour, visible odours, and in the midst of them a note of sullen red. It was as it were the very colour of his emotion. He stopped abruptly. He turned back to the window and stared frankly. It was gorgeous, he saw, but why so particularly did it appeal to him?

Then he perceived as though it was altogether self-evident what he had to do. This was what he wanted. This was the note he had to strike. Among other things because it would repudiate the accursed

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worship of pinching self-restraint that was one of the incessant stresses between them. They would come to her with a pure unexpectedness, they would flame upon her.

Then, after the roses, he would return.

Suddenly the grey trouble passed from his mind; he saw the world full of colour again. He saw the scene he desired bright and clear, saw Ethel no longer bitter and weeping, but glad as once she had always seemed glad. His heart-beats quickened. It was giving had been needed, and he would give.

Some weak voice of indiscreet discretion squeaked and vanished. He had, he knew, a sovereign in his pocket. He went in.

He found himself in front of a formidable young lady in black, and unprepared with any formula. He had never bought flowers before. He looked about him for an inspiration. He pointed at the roses. "I want those roses," he said. . . .

He emerged again with only a few small silver coins remaining out of the sovereign he had changed. The roses were to go to Ethel, properly packed; they were to be delivered according to his express direction at six o'clock.

"Six o'clock," Lewisham had reiterated very earnestly.

"We quite understand," the young lady in black had said, and had pretended to be unable to conceal a smile. "We're *quite* accustomed to sending out flowers."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE COMING OF THE ROSES

AND the roses miscarried!

When Lewisham returned from Vigours' it was already nearly seven. He entered the house with a beating heart. He had expected to find Ethel excited, the roses displayed. But her face was white and jaded. He was so surprised by this that the greeting upon his lips died away. He was balked! He went into the sitting-room and there were no roses to be seen. Ethel came past him and stood with her back to him looking out of the window. The suspense was suddenly painful. . . .

He was obliged to ask, though he was certain of the answer, "Has nothing come?"

Ethel looked at him. "What did you think had come?"

"Oh! nothing."

She looked out of the window again. "No," she said slowly, "nothing has come."

He tried to think of something to say that might bridge the distance between them, but he could think of nothing. He must wait until the roses came. He took out his books and a gaunt hour passed to supper time. Supper was a chilly ceremonial set with necessary over-polite remarks. Disappointment and exasperation darkened Lewisham's soul. He began to feel angry with everything—even with her—he

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perceived she still judged him angry and that made him angry with her. He was resuming his books and she was helping Madam Gadow's servant to clear away, when they heard a rapping at the street door. "They have come at last," he said to himself brightening, and hesitated whether he should bolt or witness her reception of them. The servant was a nuisance. Then he heard Chaffery's voice, and whispered a soft "damn!" to himself.

The only thing to do now if the roses came was to slip out into the passage, intercept them and carry them into the bedroom by the door between that and the passage. It would be undesirable for Chaffery to witness that phase of sentiment. He might flash some dart of ridicule that would stick in their memory for ever.

Lewisham tried to show that he did not want a visitor. But Chaffery was in high spirits and could have warmed a dozen cold welcomes. He sat down without any express invitation in the chair that he preferred.

Before Mr. and Mrs. Chaffery the Lewishams veiled whatever trouble might be between them beneath an insincere cordiality, and Chaffery was soon talking freely, unsuspecting of their crisis. He produced two cigars. "I had a wild moment," he said. "'For once,' said I, 'the honest shall smoke the admirable—or the admirable shall smoke the honest,' whichever you like best. Try one? No? Those austere principles of yours! There will be more pleasure then. But really, I would as soon you smoked it as I. For to-night I radiate benevolence."

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He cut the cigar with care, he lit it with ceremony, waiting until nothing but honest wood was burning on the match, and for fully a minute he was silent, evolving huge puffs of smoke. And then he spoke again, punctuating his words by varied and beautiful spirals. "So far," he said, "I have only trifled with knavery."

As Lewisham said nothing he resumed after a pause.

"There are three sorts of men in the world, my boy, three and no more—and of women only one. There are happy men and there are knaves and fools. Hybrids I don't count. And to my mind knaves and fools are very much alike."

He paused again.

"I suppose they are," said Lewisham flatly, and frowned at the fireplace.

Chaffery eyed him. "I am talking wisdom. Tonight I am talking a particular brand of wisdom. I am broaching some of my oldest and finest, because—as you will find one day—this is a special occasion. And you are distrait!"

Lewisham looked up. "Birthday?" he said.

"You will see. But I was making golden observations about knaves and fools. I was early convinced of the absolute necessity of righteousness if a man is to be happy. I know it as surely as there is a sun in the heavens. Does that surprise you?"

"Well, it hardly squares——"

"No. I know. I will explain all that. But let me tell you the happy life. Let me give you that, as if I lay on my deathbed and this was a parting

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gift. In the first place, mental integrity. Prove all things, hold fast to that which is right. Let the world have no illusions for you, no surprises. Nature is full of cruel catastrophes, man is a physically degenerate ape, every appetite, every instinct, needs the curb; salvation is not in the nature of things, but whatever salvation there may be is in the nature of man; face all these painful things. I hope you follow that?"

"Go on," said Lewisham, with the debating-society taste for a thesis prevailing for a minute over that matter of the roses.

"In youth, exercise and learning; in adolescence, ambition, and in early manhood, love—no footlight passion." Chaffery was very solemn and insistent, with a lean extended finger, upon this point.

"Then marriage, young and decent, and then children and stout honest work for them, work too for the State in which they live; a life of self-devotion, indeed, and for sunset a decent pride—that is the happy life. Rest assured that is the happy life; the life Natural Selection has been shaping for man since life began. So a man may go happy from the cradle to the grave—at least—passably happy. And to do this needs just three things—a sound body, a sound intelligence, and a sound will. . . . A sound will."

Chaffery paused on the repetition.

"No other happiness endures. And when all men are wise, all men will seek that life. Fame! Wealth! Art!—the Red Indians worship lunatics, and we are still by way of respecting the milder sorts. But I

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say that all men who do not lead that happy life are knaves and fools. The physical cripple, you know, poor devil, I count a sort of bodily fool."

"Yes," weighed Lewisham, "I suppose he is."

"Now a fool fails of happiness because of his insufficient mind, he miscalculates, he stumbles and hobbles, some cant or claptrap whirls him away; he gets passion out of a book and a wife out of the stews, or he quarrels on a petty score; threats frighten him, vanity beguiles him, he fails by blindness. But the knave who is not a fool fails against the light. Many knaves are fools also—*most* are—but some are not. I know—I am a knave but no fool. The essence of your knave is that he lacks the will, the motive capacity to seek his own greater good. The knave abhors persistence. Strait is the way and narrow the gate; the knave cannot keep to it and the fool cannot find it."

Lewisham lost something of what Chaffery was saying by reason of a rap outside. He rose, but Ethel was before him. He concealed his anxiety as well as he could, and was relieved when he heard the front door close again and her footsteps pass into the bedroom by the passage door. He reverted to Chaffery.

"Has it ever occurred to you," asked Chaffery, apparently *à propos* of nothing, "that intellectual conviction is no motive at all? Any more than a railway map will run a train a mile."

"Eh?" said Lewisham. "Map—run a train a mile—of course, yes. No, it won't."

"That is precisely my case," said Chaffery. "That

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is the case of your pure knave everywhere. We are not fools—because we know. But yonder runs the highway, windy, hard and austere, a sort of dry happiness that will endure; and here is the pleasant by-way—lush, my boy, lush, as the poets have it, and with its certain man-trap among the flowers . . .”

Ethel returned through the folding doors. She glanced at Lewisham, remained standing for awhile, sat down in the basket chair as if to resume some domestic needlework that lay upon the table, then rose and went back into the bedroom.

Chaffery proceeded to expatiate on the transitory nature of passion and all glorious and acute experiences. Whole passages of that discourse Lewisham did not hear, so intent was he upon those roses. Why had Ethel gone back into the bedroom? Was it possible—? Presently she returned, but she sat down so that he could not see her face.

“If there is one thing to set against the wholesome life it is adventure,” Chaffery was saying. “But let every adventurer pray for an early death, for with adventures come wounds, and with wounds come sickness, and—except in romances—sickness affects the nervous system. Your nerve goes. Where are you then, my boy?”

“Ssh! what’s that?” said Lewisham.

It was a rap at the house door. Heedless of the flow of golden wisdom, he went out at once and admitted a gentleman friend of Madam Gadow, who passed along the passage and vanished down the staircase. When he returned Chaffery was standing to go.

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"I could have talked with you longer," he said, "but you have something on your mind, I see. I will not worry you by guessing what. Some day you will remember . . ." He said no more but laid his hand on Lewisham's shoulder.

One might almost fancy he was offended at something.

At any other time Lewisham might have been propitiatory, but now he offered no apology. Chaffery turned to Ethel and looked at her curiously for a moment. "Good-bye," he said, holding out his hand to her.

On the doorstep Chaffery regarded Lewisham with the same curious look, and seemed to weigh some remark. "Good-bye," he said at last with something in his manner that kept Lewisham at the door for a moment looking after his stepfather's receding figure. But immediately the roses were uppermost again.

When he re-entered the living-room he found Ethel sitting idly at her typewriter, playing with the keys. She got up at his return and sat down in the arm-chair with a novelette that hid her face. He stared at her, full of questions. After all, then, they had not come. He was intensely disappointed now, he was intensely angry with the ineffable young shop-woman in black. He looked at his watch and then again, he took a book and pretended to read and found himself composing a scathing speech of remonstrance to be delivered on the morrow at the flower-shop. He put his book down, went to his black bag, opened and closed it aimlessly. He

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glanced covertly at Ethel and found her looking covertly at him. He could not quite understand her expression.

He fidgeted into the bedroom and stopped as dead as a pointer.

He felt an extraordinary persuasion of the scent of roses. So strong did it seem that he glanced outside the room door, expecting to find a box there, mysteriously arrived. But there was no scent of roses in the passage.

Then he saw close by his foot an enigmatical pale object, and stooping, picked up the creamy petal of a rose. He stood with it in his hand, perplexed beyond measure. He perceived a slight disorder of the valence of the dressing-table and linked it with this petal by a swift intuition.

He made two steps, lifted the valence, and behold! there lay his roses crushed together!

He gasped like a man who plunges suddenly into cold water. He remained stooping with the valence raised.

Ethel appeared in the half doorway and her expression was unfamiliar. He stared at her white face.

“Why on earth did you put my roses here?” he asked.

She stared back at him. Her face reflected his astonishment.

“Why did you put my roses here?” he asked again.

“Your roses!” she cried. “What! Did *you* send those roses?”

CHAPTER XXIX

THORNS AND ROSE PETALS

HE remained stooping and staring up at her, realising the implication of her words only very slowly.

Then it grew clear to him.

As she saw understanding dawning in his face, she uttered a cry of consternation. She came forward and sat down upon the little bedroom chair. She turned to him and began a sentence. "I," she said and stopped, with an impatient gesture of her hands. "*Oh!*"

He straightened himself and stood regarding her. The basket of roses lay overturned between them.

"You thought these came from someone else?" he said, trying to grasp this inversion of the universe.

She turned her eyes. "I did not know," she panted. "A trap. . . . Was it likely—they came from you?"

"You thought they came from someone else," he said.

"Yes," she said, "I did."

"Who?"

"Mr. Baynes."

"That boy!"

"Yes—that boy."

"Well!"

Lewisham looked about him—a man in the presence of the inconceivable.

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“You mean to say you have been carrying on with that youngster behind my back?” he asked.

She opened her lips to speak and had no words to say.

His pallor increased until every tinge of colour had left his face. He laughed and then set his teeth. Husband and wife looked at one another.

“I never dreamt,” he said in even tones.

He sat down on the bed, thrusting his feet among the scattered roses with a sort of grim satisfaction. “I never dreamt,” he repeated, and the flimsy basket kicked by his swinging foot hopped indignantly through the folding doors into the living-room and left a trail of blood-red petals.

They sat for perhaps two minutes and when he spoke again his voice was hoarse. He reverted to a former formula. “Look here,” he said, and cleared his throat. “I don’t know whether you think I’m going to stand this, but I’m not.”

He looked at her. She sat staring in front of her, making no attempt to cope with disaster.

“When I say I’m not going to stand it,” explained Lewisham, “I don’t mean having a row or anything of that sort. One can quarrel and be disappointed over—other things—and still go on. But this is a different thing altogether.

“Of all dreams and illusions! . . . Think what I have lost in this accursed marriage. And *now* . . . You don’t understand—you won’t understand.”

“Nor you,” said Ethel, weeping but neither looking at him nor moving her hands from her lap where they lay helplessly. “*You* don’t understand.”

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“I’m beginning to.”

He sat in silence gathering force. “In one year,” he said, “all my hopes, all my ambitions have gone. I know I have been cross and irritable—I know that. I’ve been pulled two ways. But . . . I bought you these roses.”

She looked at the roses, and then at his white face, made an imperceptible movement towards him, and became impassive again.

“I do think one thing. I have found out you are shallow, you don’t think, you can’t feel things that I think and feel. I have been getting over that. But I did think you were loyal——”

“I *am* loyal,” she cried.

“And you think— Bah!—you poke my roses under the table!”

Another portentous silence. Ethel stirred and he turned his eyes to watch what she was about to do. She produced her handkerchief and began to wipe her dry eyes rapidly, first one and then the other. Then she began sobbing. “I’m . . . as loyal as you . . . anyhow,” she said.

For a moment Lewisham was aghast. Then he perceived he must ignore that argument.

“I would have stood it—I would have stood anything if you had been loyal—if I could have been sure of you. I am a fool, I know, but I would have stood the interruption of my work, the loss of any hope of a Career, if I had been sure you were loyal. I . . . I cared for you a great deal.”

He stopped. He had suddenly perceived the pathetic. He took refuge in anger.

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“And you have deceived me! How long, how much, I don’t care. You have deceived me. And I tell you”—he began to gesticulate—“I’m not so much your slave and fool as to stand that! No woman shall make me *that* sort of fool, whatever else— So far as I am concerned, this ends things. This ends things. We are married—but I don’t care if we were married five hundred times. I won’t stop with a woman who takes flowers from another man——”

“I *didn’t*,” said Ethel.

Lewisham gave way to a transport of anger. He caught up a handful of roses and extended them, trembling. “What’s *this*?” he asked. His finger bled from a thorn, as once it had bled from a black-thorn spray.

“I *didn’t* take them,” said Ethel. “I couldn’t help it if they were sent.”

“Ugh!” said Lewisham. “But what is the good of argument and denial? You took them in, you had them. You may have been cunning, but you have given yourself away. And our life and all this”—he waved an inclusive hand at Madam Gadow’s furniture—“is at an end.”

He looked at her and repeated with bitter satisfaction, “At an end.”

She glanced at his face and his expression was remorseless. “I will not go on living with you,” he said, lest there should be any mistake. “Our life is at an end.”

Her eyes went from his face to the scattered roses. She remained staring at these. She was no longer

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weeping, and her face, save about the eyes, was white.

He presented it in another form. "I shall go away.

"We never ought to have married," he reflected.

"But . . . I never expected *this!*"

"I didn't know," she cried out, lifting up her voice. "I *didn't* know. How could *I* help! *Oh!*"

She stopped and stared at him with hands clenched, her eyes haggard with despair.

Lewisham remained impenetrably malignant.

"I don't *want* to know," he said, answering her dumb appeal. "That settles everything. *That!*" He indicated the scattered flowers. "What does it matter to me what has happened or hasn't happened? Anyhow—oh! I don't mind. I'm glad. See? It settles things.

"The sooner we part the better. I shan't stop with you another night. I shall take my box and my portmanteau into that room and pack. I shall stop in there to-night, sleep in a chair or *think*. And to-morrow I shall settle up with Madam Gadow and go. You can go back . . . to your cheating."

He stopped for some seconds. She was deadly still. "You wanted to, and now you may. You wanted to, before I got work. You remember? You know your place is still open at Lagune's. I don't care. I tell you I don't care *that*. Not that! You may go your own way—and I shall go mine. See? And all this rot—this sham of living together when neither cares for the other—I don't care for you *now*, you know, so you needn't think it—will be over and done with. As for marriage—I don't care

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that for marriage—it can't make a sham and a blunder anything but a sham.

“It's a sham, and shams have to end, and that's the end of the matter.”

He stood up resolutely. He kicked the scattered roses out of his way and dived beneath the bed for his portmanteau. Ethel neither spoke nor moved, but remained watching his movements. For a time the portmanteau refused to emerge, and he marred his stern resolution by a half audible “Come here—damn you!” He swung it into the living-room and returned for his box. He proposed to pack in that room.

When he had taken all his personal possessions out of the bedroom, he closed the folding doors with an air of finality. He knew from the sounds that followed that she flung herself upon the bed, and that filled him with grim satisfaction.

He stood listening for a space, then set about packing methodically. The first rage of discovery had abated, he knew quite clearly that he was inflicting grievous punishment and that gratified him. There was also indeed a curious pleasure in the determination of a long and painful period of vague misunderstanding by this unexpected crisis. He was acutely conscious of the silence on the other side of the folding doors, he kept up a succession of deliberate little noises, beat books together and brushed clothes, to intimate the resolute prosecution of his preparations.

That was about nine o'clock. At eleven he was still busy . . .

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Darkness came suddenly upon him. It was Madam Gadow's economical habit to turn off all her gas at that hour unless she chanced to be entertaining friends.

He felt in his pocket for matches and he had none. He whispered curses. Against such emergencies he had bought a brass lamp and in the bedroom there were candles. Ethel had a candle alight, he could see the bright yellow line that appeared between the folding doors. He felt his way presently towards the mantel, receiving a blow in the ribs from a chair on the way, and went carefully amidst Madam Gadow's once amusing ornaments.

There were no matches on the mantel. Going to the chest of drawers he almost fell over his open portmanteau. He had a silent ecstasy of rage. Then he kicked against the basket in which the roses had come. He could find no matches on the chest of drawers.

Ethel must have the matches in the bedroom, but that was absolutely impossible. He might even have to ask her for them, for at times she pocketed matches. . . . There was nothing for it but to stop packing. Not a sound came from the other room.

He decided he would sit down in the arm-chair and go to sleep. He crept very carefully to the chair and sat down. Another interval of listening and he closed his eyes and composed himself for slumber.

He began to think over his plans for the morrow. He imagined the scene with Madam Gadow, and

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then his departure to find bachelor lodgings once more. He debated in what direction he should go to get suitable lodgings. Possible difficulties with his luggage, possible annoyances of the search loomed gigantic. He felt greatly irritated at these minor difficulties. He wondered if Ethel also was packing. What particularly would she do? He listened but he could hear nothing. She was very still. She was really very still! What could she be doing? He forgot the bothers of the morrow in this new interest. Presently he rose very softly and listened. Then he sat down again impatiently. He tried to dismiss his curiosity about the silence by recapitulating the story of his wrongs.

He had some difficulty in fixing his mind upon this theme, but presently his memories were flowing freely. Only it was not wrongs now that he could recall. He was pestered by an absurd idea that he had again behaved unjustly to Ethel, that he had been headlong and malignant. He made strenuous efforts to recover his first heat of jealousy—in vain. Her remark that she had been as loyal as he, became an obstinate headline in his mind. Something arose within him that insisted upon Ethel's possible fate if he should leave her. What particularly would she do? He knew how much her character leaned upon his. Good Heavens! What might she not do?

By an effort he succeeded in fixing his mind on Baynes. That helped him back to the harsher footing. However hard things might be for her she deserved them. She deserved them!

Yet presently he slipped again, slipped back to

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the remorse and regrets of the morning time. He clutched at Baynes as a drowning man clutches at a rope, and recovered himself. For a time he meditated on Baynes. He had never seen the poet, so his imagination had scope. It appeared to him as an exasperating obstacle to a tragic avenging of his honour that Baynes was a mere boy—possibly even younger than himself.

The question, "What will become of Ethel?" rose to the surface again. He struggled against its possibilities. No! That was not it! That was her affair.

He felt inexorably kept to the path he had chosen, for all the waning of his rage. He had put his hand to the plough. "If you condone this," he told himself, "you might condone anything. There are things one *must* not stand." He tried to keep to that point of view,—assuming for the most part out of his imagination what it was he was not standing. A dim sense came to him of how much he was assuming. At any rate she must have flirted! . . . He resisted this reviving perception of justice as though it was some unspeakably disgraceful craving. He tried to imagine her with Baynes.

He determined he would go to sleep.

But his was a waking weariness. He tried counting. He tried to distract his thoughts from her by going over the atomic weights of the elements. . . .

He shivered, and realised that he was cold and sitting cramped on an uncomfortable horsehair chair. He had dozed. He glanced for the yellow line between the folding doors. It was still there but it

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seemed to quiver. He judged the candle must be flaring. He wondered why everything was so still.

Now why should he suddenly feel afraid?

He sat for a long time trying to hear some movement, his head craning forward in the darkness. . . .

A grotesque idea came into his head that all that had happened a very long time ago. He dismissed that. He contested an unreasonable persuasion that some irrevocable thing had passed. But why was everything so still?

He was invaded by a prevision of unendurable calamity.

Presently he rose and crept very slowly and with infinite precautions against noise, towards the folding doors. He stood listening with his ear near the yellow chink.

He could hear nothing, not even the measured breathing of a sleeper.

He perceived that the doors were not shut but slightly ajar. He pushed against the inner one very gently and opened it silently. Still there was no sound of Ethel. He opened the door still wider and peered into the room. The candle had burned down and was flaring in its socket. Ethel was lying half undressed upon the bed, and in her hand and close to her face was a rose.

He stood watching her, fearing to move. He listened hard and his face was very white. Even now he could not hear her breathing.

After all, it was probably all right. She was just asleep. He would slip back before she woke. If she found him——

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He looked at her again. There was something in her face——

He came nearer, no longer heeding the sounds he made. He bent over her. Even now she did not seem to breathe.

He saw that her eyelashes were still wet, the pillow by her cheek was wet. Her white, tear-stained face hurt him. . . .

She was intolerably pitiful to him. He forgot everything but that and how he had wounded her that day. And then she stirred and murmured indistinctly a foolish name she had given him.

He forgot that they were going to part for ever. He felt nothing but a great joy that she could stir and speak. His jealousy flashed out of being. He dropped upon his knees.

“Dear,” he whispered. “Is it all right? I . . . I could not hear you breathing. I could not hear you breathing.”

She started and was awake.

“I was in the other room,” said Lewisham in a voice full of emotion. “Everything was so quiet. I was afraid—I did not know what had happened. Dear—Ethel dear. Is it all right?”

She sat up quickly and scrutinised his face. “Oh! let me tell you,” she wailed. “Do let me tell you. It’s nothing. It’s nothing. You wouldn’t hear me. You wouldn’t hear me. It wasn’t fair—before you had heard me. . . .”

His arms tightened about her. “Dear,” he said, “I knew it was nothing. I knew. I knew.”

She spoke in sobbing sentences. “It was so

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simple. Mr. Baynes . . . something in his manner . . . I knew he might be silly . . . Only I did so want to help you." She paused. Just for one instant she saw one untellable indiscretion as it were in a lightning flash. A chance meeting it was, a "silly" thing or so said, a panic, retreat. She would have told it—had she known how. But she could not do it. She hesitated. She abolished it—untold. She went on: "And then, I thought he had sent the roses and I was frightened. . . . I was frightened."

"Dear one," said Lewisham. "Dear one! I have been cruel to you. I have been unjust. I understand. I do understand. Forgive me. Dearest—forgive me."

"I did so want to do something for you. It was all I could do—that little money. And then you were angry. I thought you didn't love me any more because I did not understand your work. . . . And that Miss Heydinger— Oh! it was hard."

"Dear one," said Lewisham, "I do not care your little finger for Miss Heydinger."

"I know how I hamper you. But if you will help me. Oh! I would work, I would study. I would do all I could to understand."

"Dear," whispered Lewisham. "*Dear.*"

"And to have *her*——"

"Dear," he vowed, "I have been a brute. I will end all that. I will end all that."

He took her suddenly into his arms and kissed her.

"Oh, I *know* I'm stupid," she said.

"You're not. It's I have been stupid. I have been unkind, unreasonable. All to-day— . . . I've

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been thinking about it. Dear! I don't care for anything— It's *you*. If I have you nothing else matters. . . . Only I get hurried and cross. It's the work and being poor. Dear one, we *must* hold to each other. All to-day— It's been dreadful. . . .”

He stopped. They sat clinging to one another.

“I do love you,” she said presently with her arms about him. “Oh! I do—*do*—love you.”

He drew her closer to him.

He kissed her neck. She pressed him to her.

Their lips met.

The expiring candle streamed up into a tall flame, flickered, and was suddenly extinguished. The air was heavy with the scent of roses.

CHAPTER XXX

A WITHDRAWAL

ON Tuesday Lewisham returned from Vigours' at five—at half-past six he would go on to his science class at Walham Green—and discovered Mrs. Chaffery and Ethel in tears. He was fagged and rather anxious for some tea, but the news they had for him drove tea out of his head altogether.

“He's gone,” said Ethel.

“Who's gone? What! Not Chaffery?”

Mrs. Chaffery, with a keen eye to Lewisham's behaviour, nodded tearfully over an experienced handkerchief.

Lewisham grasped the essentials of the situation forthwith, and trembled on the brink of an expletive. Ethel handed him a letter.

For a moment Lewisham held this in his hand asking questions. Mrs. Chaffery had come upon it in the case of her eight-day clock when the time to wind it came round. Chaffery, it seemed, had not been home since Saturday night. The letter was an open one addressed to Lewisham, a long rambling would-be clever letter, oddly inferior in style to Chaffery's conversation. It had been written some hours before Chaffery's last visit; his talk then had been perhaps a sort of codicil.

“The inordinate stupidity of that man Lagune is driving me out of the country,” Lewisham saw. “It

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has been at last a definite stumbling block—even a legal stumbling block, I fear. I am off. I skedaddle. I break ties. I shall miss our long refreshing chats—you had found me out and I could open my mind. I am sorry to part from Ethel also, but thank Heaven she has you to look to! And indeed they both have you to look to, though the ‘both’ may be a new light to you.”

Lewisham growled, went from page 1 to page 3—conscious of their both looking to him now—even intensely—and discovered Chaffery in a practical vein.

“There is but little light and portable property in that house in Clapham that has escaped my lamentable improvidence, but there are one or two things; the iron-bound chest, the bureau with a broken hinge, and the large air pump, distinctly pawnable if only you can contrive to get them to a pawnshop. You have more Will power than I—I never could get the confounded things downstairs. That iron-bound box was originally mine, before I married your mother-in-law, so that I am not altogether regardless of your welfare and the necessity of giving some equivalent. Don’t judge me too harshly.”

Lewisham turned over sharply without finishing that page.

“My life at Clapham,” continued the letter, “has irked me for some time, and to tell you the truth, the spectacle of your vigorous young happiness—you are having a very good time, you know, fighting the world—reminded me of the passing years. To be frank in self-criticism, there is more than a touch

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of the New Woman about me, and I feel I have still to live my own life. What a beautiful phrase that is—to live one's own life!—redolent of honest scorn for moral plagiarism. No *Imitatio Christi* in that. . . . I long to see more of men and cities. . . . I begin late, I know, to live my own life, bald as I am and grey-whiskered; but better late than never. Why should the educated girl have the monopoly of the game? And after all, the whiskers will dye. . . .

“There are things—I touch upon them lightly—that will presently astonish Lagune.” Lewisham became more attentive. “I marvel at that man, grubbing hungry for marvels amidst the almost incredibly marvellous. What can be the nature of a man who gapes after Poltergeists with the miracle of his own silly existence (inconsequent, reasonless, unfathomably weird) nearer to him than breathing and closer than hands and feet. What is *he* for, that he should wonder at Poltergeists? I am astonished these by no means flimsy psychic phenomena do not turn upon their investigators, and that a Research Society of eminent illusions and hallucinations does not pursue Lagune with sceptical inquiries. Take his house—expose the alleged man of Chelsea! *A priori* they might argue that a thing so vain, so unmeaning, so strongly beset by cackle, could only be the diseased imagining of some hysterical phantom. Do *you* believe that such a thing as Lagune exists? I must own to the gravest doubts. But happily his banker is of a more credulous type than I. . . . Of all that Lagune will tell you soon enough.”

Lewisham read no more. “I suppose he thought

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himself clever when he wrote that rot," said Lewisham bitterly, throwing the sheets forcibly athwart the table. "The simple fact is, he's stolen, or forged, or something—and bolted."

There was a pause. "What will become of Mother?" said Ethel.

Lewisham looked at Mother and thought for a moment. Then he glanced at Ethel.

"We're all in the same boat," said Lewisham.

"I don't want to give any trouble to a single human being," said Mrs. Chaffery.

"I think you might get a man his tea, Ethel," said Lewisham sitting down suddenly; "anyhow." He drummed on the table with his fingers. "I have to get to Walham Green by a quarter to seven."

"We're all in the same boat," he repeated after an interval, and continued drumming. He was chiefly occupied by the curious fact that they were all in the same boat. What an extraordinary faculty he had for acquiring responsibility! He looked up suddenly and caught Mrs. Chaffery's tearful eye directed to Ethel and full of distressful interrogation, and his perplexity was suddenly changed to pity. "It's all right, Mother," he said. "I'm not going to be unreasonable. I'll stand by you."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Chaffery. "As if I didn't know!" and Ethel came and kissed him.

He seemed in imminent danger of universal embraces.

"I wish you'd let me have my tea," he said. And while he had his tea he asked Mrs. Chaffery questions and tried to get the new situation into focus.

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But even at ten o'clock when he was returning hot and jaded from Walham Green he was still trying to get the situation into focus. There were vague ends and blank walls of interrogation in the matter, that perplexed him.

He knew that his supper would be only the prelude to an interminable "talking over," and indeed he did not get to bed until nearly two. By that time a course of action was already agreed upon. Mrs. Chaffery was tied to the house in Clapham by a long lease and thither they must go. The ground floor and first floor were let unfurnished, and the rent of these practically paid the rent of the house. The Chafferys occupied basement and second floor. There was a bedroom on the second floor formerly let to the first floor tenants, that he and Ethel could occupy, and in this an old toilet table could be put for such studies as were to be prosecuted at home. Ethel could have her typewriter in the subterranean breakfast-room. Mrs. Chaffery and Ethel must do the catering and the bulk of the housework, and as soon as possible, since letting lodgings would not square with Lewisham's professional pride, they must get rid of the lease that bound them and take some smaller and more suburban residence. If they did that without leaving any address it might save their feelings from any return of the prodigal Chaffery.

Mrs. Chaffery's frequent and pathetic acknowledgments of Lewisham's goodness only partly relieved his disposition to a philosophical bitterness. And the practical issues were complicated by excursions

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upon the subject of Chaffery, what he might have done, and where he might have gone, and whether by any chance he might not return.

When at last Mrs. Chaffery, after a violent and tearful kissing and blessing of them both—they were “good dear children,” she said—had departed, Mr. and Mrs. Lewisham returned into their sitting-room. Mrs. Lewisham’s little face was enthusiastic. “You’re a Trump,” she said, extending the willing arms that were his reward. “I know,” she said, “I know, and all to-night I have been loving you. Dear! Dear! Dear. . . .”

The next day Lewisham was too full of engagements to communicate with Lagune, but the following morning he called and found the psychic investigator busy with the proofs of *Hesperus*. He welcomed the young man cordially nevertheless, conceiving him charged with the questions that had been promised long ago—it was evident he knew nothing of Lewisham’s marriage. Lewisham stated his case with some bluntness.

“He was last here on Saturday,” said Lagune. “You have always been inclined to suspicion about him. Have you any grounds?”

“You’d better read this,” said Lewisham, repressing a grim smile, and he handed Lagune Chaffery’s letter.

He glanced at the little man ever and again to see if he had come to the personal portion, and for the rest of the time occupied himself with an envious inventory of the writing appointments about him. No doubt the boy with the big ears had had the same sort of thing . . .

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When Lagune came to the question of his real identity he blew out his cheeks in the most astonishing way but made no other sign.

“Dear, dear!” he said at last. “My bankers!”

He looked at Lewisham with the exaggerated mildness of his spectacled eye. “What do you think it means?” he asked. “Has he gone mad? We have been conducting some experiments involving—considerable mental strain. He and I and a lady. Hypnotic——”

“I should look at my cheque-book if I were you.”

Lagune produced some keys and got out his cheque-book. He turned over the counterfoils. “There’s nothing wrong here,” he said, and handed the book to Lewisham.

“Um,” said Lewisham. “I suppose this— I say, is *this* right?”

He handed back the book to Lagune, open at the blank counterfoil of a cheque that had been removed. Lagune stared and passed his hand over his forehead in a confused way. “I can’t see this,” he said.

Lewisham had never heard of post-hypnotic suggestion and he stood incredulous. “You can’t see that?” he said. “What nonsense!”

“I can’t see it,” repeated Lagune.

For some seconds Lewisham could not get away from stupid repetitions of his inquiry. Then he hit upon a collateral proof. “But look here! Can you see *this* counterfoil?”

“Plainly,” said Lagune.

“Can you read the number?”

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“Five thousand two hundred and seventy-nine.”

“Well, and this?”

“Five thousand two hundred and eighty-one.”

“Well—where’s five thousand two hundred and eighty?”

Lagune began to look uncomfortable. “Surely,” he said, “he has not— Will you read it out—the cheque, the counterfoil I mean, that I am unable to see.”

“It’s blank,” said Lewisham with an irresistible grin.

“Surely,” said Lagune, and the discomfort of his expression deepened. “Do you mind if I call in a servant to confirm——?”

Lewisham did not mind, and the same girl who had admitted him to the *séance* appeared. When she had given her evidence she went again. As she left the room by the door behind Lagune her eyes met Lewisham’s, and she lifted her eyebrows, depressed her mouth and glanced at Lagune with a meaning expression.

“I’m afraid,” said Lagune, “that I have been shabbily treated. Mr. Chaffery is a man of indisputable powers—indisputable powers; but I am afraid—I am very much afraid he has abused the conditions of the experiment. All this—and his insults—touch me rather nearly.”

He paused. Lewisham rose. “Do you mind if you come again?” asked Lagune with gentle politeness.

Lewisham was surprised to find himself sorry.

“He was a man of extraordinary gifts,” said Lagune. “I had come to rely upon him. . . . My

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cash balance has been rather heavy lately. How he came to know of that I am unable to say. Without supposing, that is, that he had very remarkable gifts."

When Lewisham saw Lagune again he learned the particulars of Chaffery's misdeed and the additional fact that the "lady" had also disappeared. "That's a good job," he remarked selfishly. "There's no chance of *his* coming back." He spent a moment trying to imagine the "lady"; he realised more vividly than he had ever done before the narrow range of his experience, the bounds of his imagination. These people also—with grey hair and truncated honour—had their emotions! Even it may be glowing! He came back to facts. Chaffery had induced Lagune when hypnotised to sign a blank cheque as an "autograph." "The strange thing is," explained Lagune, "it's doubtful if he's legally accountable. The law is so peculiar about hypnotism, and I certainly signed the cheque, you know."

The little man, in spite of his losses, was now almost cheerful again on account of a curious side issue. "You may say it is coincidence," he said, "you may call it a fluke, but I prefer to look for some other interpretation. Consider this. The amount of my balance is a secret between me and my bankers. He never had it from *me*, for I did not know it—I hadn't looked at my pass-book for months. But he drew it all in one cheque, within seventeen and sixpence of the total. And the total was over five hundred pounds!"

He seemed quite bright again as he culminated.

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“Within seventeen and sixpence,” he said. “Now how do you account for that, eh? Give me a materialistic explanation that will explain away all that. You can’t. Neither can I.”

“I think I can,” said Lewisham.

“Well—what is it?”

Lewisham nodded towards a little drawer of the bureau. “Don’t you think—perhaps”—a little ripple of laughter passed across his mind—“he had a skeleton key?”

Lagune’s face lingered amusingly in Lewisham’s mind as he returned to Clapham. But after a time that amusement passed away. He declined upon the extraordinary fact that Chaffery was his father-in-law, Mrs. Chaffery his mother-in-law, that these two and Ethel constituted his family, his clan, and that grimy graceless house up the Clapham hillside was to be his home. Home! His connection with these things as a point of worldly departure was as inexorable now as though he had been born to it. And a year ago, except for a fading reminiscence of Ethel, none of these people had existed for him. The ways of Destiny! The happenings of the last few months, foreshortened in perspective, seemed to have almost a pantomimic rapidity. The thing took him suddenly as being laughable; and he laughed.

His laugh marked an epoch. Never before had Lewisham laughed at any fix in which he had found himself. The enormous seriousness of adolescence was coming to an end; the days of his growing were numbered. It was a laugh of infinite admissions.

CHAPTER XXXI

IN BATTERSEA PARK

Now although Lewisham had promised to bring things to a conclusion with Miss Heydinger, he did nothing in the matter for five weeks, he merely left that crucial letter of hers unanswered. In that time their removal from Madam Gadow's into the gaunt house at Clapham was accomplished—not without polyglot controversy—and the young couple settled themselves into the little room on the second floor even as they had arranged. And there it was that suddenly the world was changed—was astonishingly transfigured—by a whisper.

It was a whisper between sobs and tears, with Ethel's arms about him and Ethel's hair streaming down so that it hid her face from him. And he too had whispered, dismayed perhaps a little, and yet feeling a strange pride, a strange novel emotion, feeling altogether different from the things he had fancied he might feel when this thing that he had dreaded should come. Suddenly he perceived finality, the advent of the solution, the reconciliation of the conflict that had been waged so long. Hesitations were at an end;—he took his line.

Next day he wrote a note and two mornings later he started for his mathematical duffers an hour before it was absolutely necessary, and instead of going directly to Vigours', went over the bridge to

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Battersea Park. There waiting for him by a seat where once they had met before, he found Miss Heydinger pacing. They walked up and down side by side, speaking for a little while about indifferent topics, and then they came upon a pause . . .

"You have something to tell me?" said Miss Heydinger abruptly.

Lewisham changed colour a little. "Oh yes," he said; "the fact is—" He affected ease. "Did I ever tell you I was married?"

"*Married?*"

"Yes."

"Married!"

"Yes," a little testily.

For a moment neither spoke. Lewisham stood without dignity staring at the dahlias of the London County Council, and Miss Heydinger stood regarding him.

"And that is what you have to tell me?"

Mr. Lewisham turned and met her eyes. "Yes!" he said. "That is what I have to tell you."

Pause. "Do you mind if I sit down?" asked Miss Heydinger in an indifferent tone.

"There is a seat yonder," said Lewisham, "under the tree."

They walked to the seat in silence.

"Now," said Miss Heydinger, quietly. "Tell me whom you have married."

Lewisham answered sketchily. She asked him another question and another. He felt stupid and answered with a halting truthfulness.

"I might have known," she said, "I might have

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known. Only I would not know. Tell me some more. Tell me about her."

Lewisham did. The whole thing was abominably disagreeable to him, but it had to be done, he had promised Ethel it should be done. Presently Miss Heydinger knew the main outline of his story, knew all his story except the emotion that made it credible. "And you were married—before the second examination?" she repeated.

"Yes," said Lewisham.

"But why did you not tell me of this before?" asked Miss Heydinger.

"I don't know," said Lewisham. "I wanted to—that day, in Kensington Gardens. But I didn't. I suppose I ought to have done so."

"I think you ought to have done so."

"Yes, I suppose I ought . . . But I didn't. Somehow—it has been hard. I didn't know what you would say. The thing seemed so rash, you know, and all that."

He paused blankly.

"I suppose you had to do it," said Miss Heydinger presently, with her eyes on his profile.

Lewisham began the second and more difficult part of his explanation. "There's been a difficulty," he said, "all the way along—I mean—about you, that is. It's a little difficult— The fact is, my wife, you know— She looks at things differently from what we do."

"We?"

"Yes—it's odd, of course. But she has seen your letters——"

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“You didn’t show her——?”

“No. But, I mean, she knows you write to me, and she knows you write about Socialism and Literature and—things we have in common—things she hasn’t.”

“You mean to say she doesn’t understand these things?”

“She’s not thought about them. I suppose there’s a sort of difference in education——”

“And she objects——?”

“No,” said Lewisham, lying promptly. “She doesn’t *object* . . .”

“Well?” said Miss Heydinger, and her face was white.

“She feels that— She feels—she does not say, of course, but I know she feels that it is something she ought to share. I know—how she cares for me. And it shames her—it reminds her— Don’t you see how it hurts her?”

“Yes. I see. So that even that little—” Miss Heydinger’s breath seemed to catch and she was abruptly silent.

She spoke at last with an effort. “That it hurts *me*,” she said, and grimaced and stopped again.

“No,” said Lewisham, “that is not it.” He hesitated.

“I *knew* this would hurt you.”

“You love her. You can sacrifice——”

“No. It is not that. But there is a difference. Hurting *her*—she would not understand. But you—somehow it seems a natural thing for me to come to you. I seem to look to you— For her I am always making allowances——”

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"You love her."

"I wonder if it *is* that makes the difference. Things are so complex. Love means anything—or nothing. I know you better than I do her, you know me better than she will ever do. I could tell you things I could not tell her. I could put all myself before you—almost—and know you would understand— Only——"

"You love her."

"Yes," said Lewisham lamely and pulling at his moustache. "I suppose . . . that must be it."

For a space neither spoke. Then Miss Heydinger said "*Oh!*" with extraordinary emphasis.

"To think of this end to it all! That all your promise . . . What is it she gives that I could not have given?"

"Even now! Why should I give up that much of you that is mine? If she could take it— But she cannot take it. If I let you go—you will do nothing. All this ambition, all these interests will dwindle and die, and she will not mind. She will not understand. She will think that she still has you. Why should she covet what she cannot possess? Why should she be given the thing that is mine—to throw aside?"

She did not look at Lewisham, but before her, her face a white misery.

"In a way—I had come to think of you as something belonging to me . . . I shall—still."

"There is one thing," said Lewisham after a pause; "it is a thing that has come to me once or twice lately. Don't you think that perhaps you over-estimate the things I might have done? I

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know we've talked of great things to do. But I've been struggling for half a year and more to get the sort of living almost any one seems able to get. It has taken me all my time. One can't help thinking after that, perhaps the world is a stiffer sort of affair . . ."

"No," she said decisively. "You could have done great things.

"Even now," she said, "you may do great things— If only I might see you sometimes, write to you sometimes— You are so capable and—weak. You must have somebody— That is your weakness. You fail in your belief. You must have support and belief—unstinted support and belief. Why could I not be that to you? It is all I want to be. At least—all I want to be now. Why need she know? It robs her of nothing. I want nothing—she has. But I know of my own strength too I can do nothing. I know that with you . . . It is only knowing hurts her. Why should she know?"

Mr. Lewisham looked at her doubtfully. That phantom greatness of his, it was that lit her eyes. In that instant at least he had no doubts of the possibility of his Career. But he knew that in some way the secret of his greatness and this admiration went together. Conceivably they were one and indivisible. Why indeed need Ethel know? His imagination ran over the things that might be done, the things that might happen, and touched swiftly upon complication, confusion, discovery.

"The thing is, I must simplify my life. I shall do nothing unless I simplify my life. Only people

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who are well off can be—complex. It is one thing or the other——”

He hesitated and suddenly had a vision of Ethel weeping as once he had seen her weep with the light on the tears in her eyes.

“No,” he said almost brutally. “No. It’s like this— I can’t do anything underhand. I mean— I’m not so amazingly honest—now. But I’ve not that sort of mind. She would find me out. It would do no good and she would find me out. My life’s too complex. I can’t manage it and go straight. I—you’ve overrated me. And besides— Things have happened. Something—” He hesitated and then snatched at his resolve. “I’ve got to simplify—and that’s the plain fact of the case. I’m sorry, but it is so.”

Miss Heydinger made no answer. Her silence astonished him. For nearly twenty seconds perhaps they sat without speaking. With a quick motion she stood up and at once he stood up before her. Her face was flushed, her eyes downcast.

“Good-bye,” she said suddenly in a low tone and held out her hand.

“But,” said Lewisham and stopped. Miss Heydinger’s colour left her.

“Good-bye,” she said, looking him suddenly in the eyes and smiling awry. “There is no more to say, is there? Good-bye.”

He took her hand. “I hope I didn’t——”

“Good-bye,” she said impatiently, and suddenly disengaged her hand and turned away from him. He made a step after her.

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“Miss Heydinger,” he said, but she did not stop. “Miss Heydinger.” He realised that she did not want to answer him again. . . .

He remained motionless, watching her retreating figure. An extraordinary sense of loss came into his mind, a vague impulse to pursue her and pour out vague passionate protestations. . . .

Not once did she look back. She was already remote when he began hurrying after her. Once he was in motion he quickened his pace and gained upon her. He was within thirty yards of her as she drew near the gates.

His pace slackened. Suddenly he was afraid she might look back. She passed out of the gates, out of his sight. He stopped, looking where she had disappeared. He sighed and took the pathway to his left that led back to the bridge and Vigours.

Half-way across this bridge came another crisis of indecision. He stopped, hesitating. An impertinent thought obtruded. He looked at his watch and saw that he must hurry if he would catch the train for Earl's Court and Vigours. He said Vigours might go to the devil.

But in the end he caught his train.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE CROWNING VICTORY

THAT night about seven Ethel came into their room with a waste-paper basket she had bought for him, and found him sitting at the little toilet table at which he was to "write." The outlook was, for a London outlook, spacious, down a long slope of roofs towards the Junction, a huge sky of blue passing upward to the darkling zenith and downward into a hazy bristling mystery of roofs and chimneys, from which emerged signal lights and steam puffs, gliding chains of lit window carriages and the vague vistas of streets. She showed him the basket and put it beside him, and then her eye caught the yellow document in his hand. "What is that you have there?"

He held it out to her, "I found it—lining my yellow box. I had it at Whortley."

She took it and perceived a chronological scheme. It was headed "SCHEMA," there were memoranda in the margin, and all the dates had been altered by a hasty hand.

"Hasn't it got yellow?" she said.

That seemed to him the wrong thing for her to say. He stared at the document with a sudden accession of sympathy. There was an interval. He became aware of her hand upon his shoulder, that

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she was bending over him. "Dear," she whispered, with a strange change in the quality of her voice. He knew she was seeking to say something that was difficult to say.

"Yes?" he said presently.

"You are not grieving?"

"What about?"

"*This.*"

"No!"

"You are not—you are not even sorry?" she said.

"No—not even sorry."

"I can't understand that. It's so much——"

"I'm glad," he proclaimed. "*Glad.*"

"But—the trouble—the expense—everything—and your work?"

"Yes," he said, "that's just it."

She looked at him doubtfully. He glanced up at her, and she questioned his eyes. He put his arm about her, and presently and almost absent-mindedly she obeyed his pressure and bent down and kissed him.

"It settles things," he said, holding her. "It joins us. Don't you see? Before . . . But now it's different. It's something we have between us. It's something that . . . It's the link we needed. It will hold us together, cement us together. It will be our life. This will be my work now. The other . . ."

He faced a truth. "It was just . . . vanity!"

There was still a shade of doubt in her face, a wistfulness.

Presently she spoke.

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"Dear," she said.

"Yes?"

She knitted her brows. "No!" she said. "I can't say it."

In the interval she came into a sitting position on his knees.

He kissed her hand, but her face remained grave, and she looked out upon the twilight. "I know I'm stupid," she said. "The things I say . . . aren't the things I feel."

He waited for her to say more.

"It's no good," she said.

He felt the onus of expression lay on him. He too found it a little difficult to put into words. "I think I understand," he said, and wrestled with the impalpable. The pause seemed long and yet not altogether vacant. She lapsed abruptly into the prosaic. She started from him.

"If I don't go down, Mother will get supper . . ."

At the door she stopped and turned a twilight face to him. For a moment they scrutinised one another. To her he was no more than a dim outline. Impulsively he held out his arms. . . .

Then at the sound of a movement downstairs she freed herself and hurried out. He heard her call, "Mother! You're not to lay supper. You're to rest."

He listened to her footsteps until the kitchen had swallowed them up. Then he turned his eyes to the Schema again and for a moment it seemed but a little thing.

He picked it up in both hands and looked at it as if it was the writing of another man, and indeed it

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was the writing of another man. "Pamphlets in the Liberal Interest," he read, and smiled.

Presently a train of thought carried him off. His attitude relaxed a little, the Schema became for a time a mere symbol, a point of departure, and he stared out of the window at the darkling night. For a long time he sat pursuing thoughts that were half emotions, emotions that took upon themselves the shape and substance of ideas. The deepening current stirred at last among the roots of speech.

"Yes, it was vanity," he said. "A boy's vanity. For me—anyhow. I'm too two-sided . . . Two-sided? . . . Commonplace!

"Dreams like mine—abilities like mine. Yes—any man! And yet . . . The things I meant to do!"

His thoughts went to his Socialism, to his red-hot ambition of world mending. He marvelled at the vistas he had discovered since those days.

"Not for us— Not for us.

"We must perish in the wilderness— Some day. Somewhen. But not for us. . . .

"Come to think, it is all the Child. The future is the Child. The Future. What are we—any of us—but servants or traitors to that? . . .

.
"Natural Selection—it follows . . . this way is happiness . . . must be. There can be no other."

He sighed. "To last a lifetime, that is.

"And yet—it is almost as if Life had played me a trick—promised so much—given so little! . . .

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“No! One must not look at it in that way! That will not do! That will *not* do.

“Career! In itself it is a career—the most important career in the world. Father! Why should I want more?”

“And . . . Ethel! No wonder she seemed shallow . . . She has been shallow. No wonder she was restless. Unfulfilled . . . What had she to do? She was drudge, she was toy . . .

“Yes. This is life. This alone is life! For this we were made and born. All these other things—all other things—they are only a sort of play . . .

“Play!”

His eyes came back to the Schema. His hands shifted to the opposite corner and he hesitated. The vision of that arranged Career, that ordered sequence of work and successes, distinction and yet further distinctions, rose brightly from the symbol. Then he compressed his lips and tore the yellow sheet in half, tearing very deliberately. He doubled the halves and tore again, doubled again very carefully and neatly until the Schema was torn into numberless little pieces. With it he seemed to be tearing his past self.

“Play,” he whispered after a long silence.

“It is the end of adolescence,” he said; “the end of empty dreams. . . .”

He became very still, his hands resting on the table, his eyes staring out of the blue oblong of the window. The dwindling light gathered itself together and became a star.

He found he was still holding the torn fragments.

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He stretched out his hand and dropped them into that new waste-paper basket Ethel had bought for him.

Two pieces fell outside the basket. He stooped, picked them up and put them carefully with their fellows.

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