

THE GUIDING THREAD

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the notebook and disappeared into the solitudes of the night, out of reach, out of ken, as now.

It was nearly two hours before he came back, broken-hearted and in despair.

"My God, what have I done?" he kept on murmuring.

He shivered. He drew up to the fire and cast logs on it recklessly. He drew nearer to it and threw more logs; but nothing availed to warm him. His hands, his feet were deadly cold; and stone cold was his heart.

"Nothing to live for," he murmured, "nothing to keep decent for — and my own fault."

He dragged himself to his bedroom, and stood for a moment looking at the manuscript of the Renaissance, piled up on the table by his bed where he had worked so hard at it, alone, but bravely, and always with the hope at the back of his heart, that one day he would be able to show to Joan what he had done in her absence, what he had altered, improved, rejected. There it lay intact, almost finished — and yet for him a meaningless structure — in ruins — wrecked by him. He turned away from it, and took from a drawer the drug from which he had been abstaining ever since he had been seized with horror of himself and his murderous intention towards Beaudesart. He injected a strong dose, and with a sigh of relief, returned to the fireside.

"At least now I shall forget for the time," he said. "And to-morrow I must think what is to be done."

He shivered again, threw on yet another log, sank back in his chair, was soon drowsy, then inanimate, and then deep under the influence of the drug.