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lay and increased by every motion. At last, weak in all his limbs, he stepped from the vehicle at his own door.

Entering the house, he instantly mounted the stairs and passed to his own rooms. Opening the bedroom door, he peered in cautiously, then pushed the door wide. The light had been switched on, but the room was empty. With a nervous excitement scarcely to be kept in check, he entered, shut and locked the door, then moved to the wardrobe, and, opening it, drew the tube of tabloids from the shelf.

His hand shook violently as he carried the tube to the table. The strain of the day, the anxiety of the past hours, with their final failure, had found sudden expression. Mixing a larger dose than any he had before allowed himself, he swallowed it hastily, and, walking across the room, threw himself, fully dressed, upon the bed.

IV

TO those whose sphere lies in the west of London, Fleet Street is little more than a name, and Clifford's Inn a mere dead letter. Yet Clifford's Inn lies as safely stowed away in the shadow of the Law Courts as any grave under a country church wall; it is as green of grass, as gray of stone, as irresponsible to the passing footstep.

Facing the railed-in grass-plot of its little court stood the house in which John Loder had his rooms. Taken at a first glance, the house had the deserted air of an office, inhabited only in the early hours; but, as night fell, lights would be seen to show out, first on one floor, then on another — faint, human beacons unconsciously signalling each other. The rooms Loder inhabited were on the highest floor; and from their windows one might gaze philosophically on the tree-tops, forgetting the uneven pavement and the worn railing that hemmed them round. In the landing outside the rooms his name appeared above his door, but the paint had been soiled by time, and the letters for the most part reduced to shadows; so that, taken in conjunction with the gaunt staircase and bare walls, the place had a cheerless look.

Inside, however, the effect was somewhat mitigated. The room on the right hand, as one entered the small passage that served as hall, was of fair size, though low-

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ceiled. The paint of the wall-panelling, like the name above the outer door, had long ago been worn to a dirty and nondescript hue, and the floor was innocent of carpet; yet in the middle of the room stood a fine old Cromwell table, and on the plain deal book-shelves and along the mantel-piece were some valuable books—political and historical. There were no curtains on the windows, and a common reading-lamp with a green shade stood on a desk. It was the room of a man with few hobbies and no pleasures—who existed because he was alive, and worked because he must.

Three nights after the great fog John Loder sat by his desk in the light of the green-shaded lamp. The remains of a very frugal supper stood on the centre-table, and in the grate a small and economical-looking fire was burning.

Having written for close on two hours, he pushed back his chair and stretched his cramped fingers; then he yawned, rose, and slowly walked across the room. Reaching the mantel-piece, he took a pipe from the pipe-rack and some tobacco from the jar that stood behind the books. His face looked tired and a little worn, as is common with men who have worked long at an uncongenial task. Shredding the tobacco between his hands, he slowly filled the pipe, then lighted it from the fire with a spill of twisted paper.

Almost at the moment that he applied the light the sound of steps mounting the uncarpeted stairs outside caught his attention, and he raised his head to listen.

Presently the steps halted and he heard a match struck. The stranger was evidently uncertain of his whereabouts. Then the steps moved forward again and paused.

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An expression of surprise crossed Loder's face, and he laid down his pipe. As the visitor knocked, he walked quietly across the room and opened the door.

The passage outside was dark, and the new-comer drew back before the light from the room.

"Mr. Loder—?" he began, interrogatively. Then all at once he laughed in embarrassed apology. "Forgive me," he said. "The light rather dazzled me. I didn't realize who it was."

Loder recognized the voice as belonging to his acquaintance of the fog.

"Oh, it's you!" he said. "Won't you come in?" His voice was a little cold. This sudden resurrection left him surprised—and not quite pleasantly surprised. He walked back to the fireplace, followed by his guest.

The guest seemed nervous and agitated. "I must apologize for the hour of my visit," he said. "My—my time is not quite my own."

Loder waved his hand. "Whose time is his own?" he said.

Chilcote, encouraged by the remark, drew nearer to the fire. Until this moment he had refrained from looking directly at his host; now, however, he raised his eyes, and, despite his preparation, he recoiled unavoidably before the extraordinary resemblance. Seen here, in the casual surroundings of a badly furnished and crudely lighted room, it was even more astounding than it had been in the mystery of the fog.

"Forgive me," he said again. "It is physical—purely physical. I am bowled over against my will."

Loder smiled. The slight contempt that Chilcote had first inspired rose again, and with it a second feeling

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less easily defined. The man seemed so unstable, so incapable, yet so grotesquely suggestive to himself.

"The likeness is rather overwhelming," he said; "but not heavy enough to sink under. Come nearer the fire. What brought you here? Curiosity?" There was a wooden arm-chair by the fireplace. He indicated it with a wave of the hand; then turned and took up his smouldering pipe.

Chilcote, watching him furtively, obeyed the gesture and sat down.

"It is extraordinary!" he said, as if unable to dismiss the subject. "It—it is quite extraordinary!"

The other glanced round. "Let's drop it," he said. "It's so confoundedly obvious." Then his tone changed. "Won't you smoke?" he asked.

"Thanks." Chilcote began to fumble for his cigarettes.

But his host forestalled him. Taking a box from the mantel-piece, he held it out.

"My one extravagance!" he said, ironically. "My resources bind me to one; and I think I have made a wise selection. It is about the only vice we haven't to pay for six times over." He glanced sharply at the face so absurdly like his own, then, lighting a fresh spill, offered his guest a light.

Chilcote moistened his cigarette and leaned forward. In the flare of the paper his face looked set and anxious, but Loder saw that the lips did not twitch as they had done on the previous occasion that he had given him a light, and a look of comprehension crossed his eyes.

"What will you drink? Or, rather, will you have a whiskey? I keep nothing else. Hospitality is one of the debarred luxuries."

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Chilcote shook his head. "I seldom drink. But don't let that deter you."

Loder smiled. "I have one drink in the twenty-four hours—generally at two o'clock, when my night's work is done. A solitary man has to look where he is going."

"You work till two?"

"Two—or three."

Chilcote's eyes wandered to the desk. "You write?" he asked.

The other nodded curtly.

"Books?" Chilcote's tone was anxious.

Loder laughed, and the bitter note showed in his voice.

"No—not books," he said.

Chilcote leaned back in his chair and passed his hand across his face. The strong wave of satisfaction that the words woke in him was difficult to conceal.

"What is your work?"

Loder turned aside. "You must not ask that," he said, shortly. "When a man has only one capacity, and the capacity has no outlet, he is apt to run to seed in a wrong direction. I cultivate weeds—at abominable labor and a very small reward." He stood with his back to the fire, facing his visitor; his attitude was a curious blending of pride, defiance, and despondency.

Chilcote leaned forward again. "Why speak of yourself like that? You are a man of intelligence and education." He spoke questioningly, anxiously.

"Intelligence and education!" Loder laughed shortly. "London is cemented with intelligence. And education! What is education? The court dress necessary to presentation, the wig and gown necessary to the barrister. But do the wig and gown necessarily

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mean briefs? Or the court dress royal favor? Education is the accessory; it is influence that is essential. *You* should know that."

Chilcote moved restlessly in his seat. "You talk bitterly," he said.

The other looked up. "I think bitterly, which is worse. I am one of the unlucky beggars who, in the expectation of money, has been denied a profession—even a trade, to which to cling in time of shipwreck; and who, when disaster comes, drift out to sea. I warned you the other night to steer clear of me. I come under the head of flotsam!"

Chilcote's face lighted. "You came a cropper?" he asked.

"No. It was some one else who came the cropper. I only dealt in results."

"Big results?"

"A drop from a probable eighty thousand pounds to a certain eight hundred."

Chilcote glanced up. "How did you take it?" he asked.

"I? Oh, I was twenty-five then. I had a good many hopes and a lot of pride; but there is no place for either in a working world."

"But your people?"

"My last relation died with the fortune."

"Your friends?"

Loder laid down his pipe. "I told you I was twenty-five," he said, with the tinge of humor that sometimes crossed his manner. "Doesn't that explain things? I had never taken favors in prosperity; a change of fortune was not likely to alter my ways. As I have said, I was twenty-five." He smiled. "When I real-

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ized my position I sold all my belongings with the exception of a table and a few books—which I stored. I put on a walking-suit and let my beard grow; then, with my entire capital in my pocket, I left England without saying good-bye to any one."

"For how long?"

"Oh, for six years. I wandered half over Europe and through a good part of Asia in the time."

"And then?"

"Then? Oh, I shaved off the beard and came back to London!" He looked at Chilcote, partly contemptuous, partly amused at his curiosity.

But Chilcote sat staring in silence. The domination of the other's personality and the futility of his achievements baffled him.

Loder saw his bewilderment. "You wonder what the devil I came into the world for," he said. "I sometimes wonder the same myself."

At his words a change passed over Chilcote. He half rose, then dropped back into his seat.

"You have no friends?" he said. "Your life is worth nothing to you?"

Loder raised his head. "I thought I had conveyed that impression."

"You are an absolutely free man."

"No man is free who works for his bread. If things had been different I might have been in such shoes as yours, sauntering in legislative byways; my hopes turned that way once. But hopes, like more substantial things, belong to the past—" He stopped abruptly and looked at his companion.

The change in Chilcote had become more acute; he sat fingering his cigarette, his brows drawn down, his

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lips set nervously in a conflict of emotions. For a space he stayed very still, avoiding Loder's eyes; then, as if decision had suddenly come to him, he turned and met his gaze.

"How if there was a future," he said, "as well as a past?"

V

FOR the space of a minute there was silence in the room, then outside in the still night three clocks simultaneously chimed eleven, and their announcement was taken up and echoed by half a dozen others, loud and faint, hoarse and resonant; for all through the hours of darkness the neighborhood of Fleet Street is alive with chimes.

Chilcote, startled by the jangle, rose from his seat; then, as if driven by an uncontrollable impulse, he spoke again.

"You probably think I am mad—" he began.

Loder took his pipe out of his mouth. "I am not so presumptuous," he said, quietly.

For a space the other eyed him silently, as if trying to gauge his thoughts; then once more he broke into speech.

"Look here," he said. "I came to-night to make a proposition. When I have made it you'll first of all jeer at it—as I jeered when I made it to myself; then you'll see its possibilities—as I did; then"—he paused and glanced round the room nervously—"then you'll accept it—as I did." In the uneasy haste of his speech his words broke off almost unintelligibly.

Involuntarily Loder lifted his head to retort, but Chilcote put up his hand. His face was set with the obstinate determination that weak men sometimes exhibit.