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his life, his ambitions, his determinations, were his own. He lifted his eyes and looked at her.

"You want me to tell you that I will go on?" he said.

Her eyes brightened; she took a step forward. "Yes," she said, "I want it more than anything in the world."

There was a wait. The declaration that would satisfy her came to Loder's lips, but he delayed it. The delay was fateful. While he stood silent the door opened and the servant who had brought in the tea reappeared.

He crossed the room and handed Loder a telegram. "Any answer, sir?" he said.

Eve moved back to her chair. There was a flush on her cheeks and her eyes were still alertly bright.

Loder tore the telegram open, read it, then threw it into the fire.

"No answer!" he said, laconically.

At the brusqueness of his voice, Eve looked up. "Disagreeable news?" she said, as the servant departed.

He didn't look at her. He was watching the telegram withering in the centre of the fire.

"No," he said at last, in a strained voice. "No. Only news that I—that I had forgotten to expect."

XI

THERE was a silence—an uneasy break—after Loder spoke. The episode of the telegram was, to all appearances, ordinary enough, calling forth Eve's question and his own reply as a natural sequence; yet in the pause that followed it each was conscious of a jar, each was aware that in some subtle way the thread of sympathy had been dropped, though to one the cause was inexplicable and to the other only too plain.

Loder watched the ghost of his message grow whiter and thinner, then dissolve into airy fragments and flutter up the chimney. As the last morsel wavered out of sight, he turned and looked at his companion.

"You almost made me commit myself," he said. In the desire to hide his feelings his tone was short.

Eve returned his glance with a quiet regard, but he scarcely saw it. He had a stupefied sense of disaster; a feeling of bitter self-commiseration that for the moment outweighed all other considerations. Almost at the moment of justification the good of life had crumbled in his fingers, the soil given beneath his feet, and with an absence of logic, a lack of justice unusual in him, he let resentment against Chilcote sweep suddenly over his mind.

Eve, still watching him, saw the darkening of his expression, and with a quiet movement rose from her chair.

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"Lady Sarah has a theatre-party to-night, and I am dining with her," she said. "It is an early dinner, so I must think about dressing. I'm sorry you think I tried to draw you into anything. I must have explained myself badly." She laughed a little, to cover the slight discomfiture that her tone betrayed, and as she laughed she moved across the room towards the door.

Loder, engrossed in the check to his own schemes, incensed at the suddenness of Chilcote's recall, and still more incensed at his own folly in not having anticipated it, was oblivious for the moment of both her movement and her words. Then, quite abruptly, they obtruded themselves upon him, breaking through his egotism with something of the sharpness of pain following a blow. Turning quickly from the fireplace, he faced the shadowy room across which she had passed, but simultaneously with his turning she gained the door.

The knowledge that she was gone struck him with a sense of double loss. "Wait!" he called, suddenly moving forward. But almost at once he paused, chilled by the solitude of the room.

"Eve!" he said, using her name unconsciously for the first time.

But the corridor, as well as the room, was empty; he was too late. He stood irresolute; then he laughed shortly, turned, and passed back towards the fireplace.

The blow had fallen, the inevitable come to pass, and nothing remained but to take the fact with as good a grace as possible. Chilcote's telegram had summoned him to Clifford's Inn at seven o'clock, and it was now well on towards six. He pulled out his watch—Chilcote's watch he realized, with a touch of grim humor

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as he stooped to examine the dial by the light of the fire; then, as if the humor had verged to another feeling, he stood straight again and felt for the electric button in the wall. His fingers touched it, and simultaneously the room was lighted.

The abrupt alteration from shadow to light came almost as a shock. The feminine arrangement of the tea-table seemed incongruous beside the sober books and the desk laden with papers—incongruous as his own presence in the place. The thought was unpleasant, and he turned aside as if to avoid it; but at the movement his eyes fell on Chilcote's cigarette-box with its gleaming monogram, and the whimsical suggestion of his first morning rose again. The idea that the inanimate objects in the room knew him for what he was—recognized the interloper where human eyes saw the rightful possessor—returned to his mind. Through all his disgust and chagrin a smile forced itself to his lips, and, crossing the room for the second time, he passed into Chilcote's bedroom.

There the massive furniture and sombre atmosphere fitted better with his mood than the energy and action which the study always suggested. Walking directly to the great bed, he sat on its side and for several minutes stared straight in front of him, apparently seeing nothing; then at last the apathy passed from him, as his previous anger against Chilcote had passed. He stood up slowly, drawing his long limbs together, and recrossed the room, passing along the corridor and through the door communicating with the rest of the house. Five minutes later he was in the open air and walking steadily eastward, his hat drawn forward and his overcoat buttoned up.

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As he traversed the streets he allowed himself no thought. Once, as he waited in Trafalgar Square to find a passage between the vehicles, the remembrance of Chilcote's voice coming out of the fog on their first night made itself prominent, but he rejected it quickly, guarding himself from even an involuntary glance at the place of their meeting. The Strand, with its unceasing life, came to him as something almost unfamiliar. Since his identification with the new life no business had drawn him east of Charing Cross, and his first sight of the narrower stream of traffic struck him as garish and unpleasant. As the impression came he accelerated his steps, moved by the wish to make regret and retrospection alike impossible by a contact with actual forces.

Still walking hastily, he entered Clifford's Inn, but there almost unconsciously his feet halted. There was something in the quiet immutability of the place that sobered energy, both mental and physical. A sense of changelessness—the changelessness of inanimate things, that rises in such solemn contrast to the variability of mere human nature, which a new environment, a new outlook, sometimes even a new presence, has power to upheave and remould. He paused; then with slower and steadier steps crossed the little court and mounted the familiar stairs of his own house.

As he turned the handle of his own door some one stirred inside the sitting-room. Still under the influence of the stones and trees that he had just left, he moved directly towards the sound, and, without waiting for permission, entered the room. After the darkness of the passage it seemed well alight, for, besides the lamp with its green shade, a large fire

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burned in the grate and helped to dispel the shadows.

As he entered the room Chilcote rose and came forward, his figure thrown into strong relief by the double light. He was dressed in a shabby tweed suit; his face looked pale and set with a slightly nervous tension, but besides the look and a certain added restlessness of glance there was no visible change. Reaching Loder, he held out his hand.

"Well?" he said, quickly.

The other looked at him questioningly.

"Well? Well? How has it gone?"

"The scheme? Oh, excellently!" Loder's manner was abrupt. Turning from the restless curiosity in Chilcote's eyes, he moved a little way across the room and began to draw off his coat. Then, as if struck by the incivility of the action, he looked back again. "The scheme has gone extraordinarily," he said. "I could almost say absurdly. There are some things, Chilcote, that fairly bowl a man over."

A great relief tinged Chilcote's face. "Good!" he exclaimed. "Tell me all about it."

But Loder was reticent. The moment was not propitious. It was as if a hungry man had dreamed a great banquet and had awakened to his starvation. He was chary of imparting his visions.

"There's nothing to tell," he said, shortly. "All that you'll want to know is here in black and white. I don't think you'll find I have slipped anything; it's a clear business record." From an inner pocket he drew out a bulky note-book, and, recrossing the room, laid it open on the table. It was a correct, even a minute, record of every action that had been accom-

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plished in Chilcote's name. "I don't think you'll find any loose ends," he said, as he turned back the pages. "I had you and your position in my mind all through." He paused and glanced up from the book. "You have a position that absolutely insists upon attention," he added, in a different voice.

At the new tone Chilcote looked up as well. "No moral lectures!" he said, with a nervous laugh. "I was anxious to know if you had pulled it off—and you have reassured me. That's enough. I was in a funk this afternoon to know how things were going—one of those sudden, unreasonable funks. But now that I see you"—he cut himself short and laughed once more—"now that I see you, I'm hanged if I don't want to— to prolong your engagement."

Loder glanced at him, then glanced away. He felt a quick shame at the eagerness that rose at the words—a surprised contempt at his own readiness to anticipate the man's weakness. But almost as speedily as he had turned away he looked back again.

"Tush, man!" he said, with his old, intolerant manner. "You're dreaming. You've had your holiday and school's begun again. You must remember you are dining with the Charringtons to-night. Young Charrington's coming of age—quite a big business. Come along! I want my clothes." He laughed, and, moving closer to Chilcote, slapped him on the shoulder.

Chilcote started; then, suddenly becoming imbued with the other's manner, he echoed the laugh.

"By Jove!" he said, "you're right! You're quite right! A man must keep his feet in their own groove." Raising his hand, he began to fumble with his tie.

But Loder kept the same position. "You'll find the

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check-book in its usual drawer," he said. "I've made one entry of a hundred pounds—pay for the first week. The rest can stand over until—" He paused abruptly.

Chilcote shifted his position. "Don't talk about that. It upsets me to anticipate. I can make out a check to-morrow payable to John Loder."

"No. That can wait. The name of Loder is better out of the book. We can't be too careful." Loder spoke with unusual impetuosity. Already a slight, unreasonable jealousy was coloring his thoughts. Already he grudged the idea of Chilcote with his unstable glance and restless fingers opening the drawers and sorting the papers that for one stupendous fortnight had been his without question. Turning aside, he changed the subject brusquely.

"Come into the bedroom," he said. "It's half-past seven if it's a minute, and the Charringtons' show is at nine." Without waiting for a reply, he walked across the room and held the door open.

There was no silence while they exchanged clothes. Loder talked continuously, sometimes in short, curt sentences, sometimes with ironic touches of humor; he talked until Chilcote, strangely affected by contact with another personality after his weeks of solitude, fell under his influence—his excitement rising, his imagination stirring at the novelty of change. At last, garbed once more in the clothes of his own world, he passed from the bedroom back into the sitting-room, and there halted, waiting for his companion.

Almost directly Loder followed. He came into the room quietly, and, moving at once to the table, picked up the note-book.

"I'm not going to preach," he began, "so you needn't

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shut me up. But I'll say just one thing—a thing that *will* get said. Try and keep your hold! Remember your responsibilities—and keep your hold!" He spoke energetically, looking earnestly into Chilcote's eyes. He did not realize it, but he was pleading for his own career.

Chilcote paled a little, as he always did in face of a reality. Then he extended his hand.

"My dear fellow," he said, with a touch of hauteur, "a man can generally be trusted to look after his own life."

Extricating his hand almost immediately, he turned towards the door and without a word of farewell passed into the little hall, leaving Loder alone in the sitting-room.

XII

ON the night of Chilcote's return to his own, Loder tasted the lees of life poignantly for the first time. Before their curious compact had been entered upon he had been, if not content, at least apathetic; but with action the apathy had been dispersed, never again to regain its old position.

He realized with bitter certainty that his was no real home-coming. On entering Chilcote's house he had experienced none of the unfamiliarity, none of the unsettled awkwardness, that assailed him now. There he had almost seemed the exile returning after many hardships; here, in the atmosphere made common by years, he felt an alien. It was illustrative of the man's character that sentimentalities found no place in his nature. Sentiments were not lacking, though they lay out of sight, but sentimentalities he altogether denied.

Left alone in the sitting-room after Chilcote's departure, his first sensation was one of physical discomfort and unfamiliarity. His own clothes, with their worn looseness, brought no sense of friendliness such as some men find in an old garment. Lounging, and the clothes that suggested lounging, had no appeal for him. In his eyes the garb that implies responsibility was symbolic and even inspiring.

And, as with clothes, so with his actual surround-