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trying to do this for you. Don't you see? Don't you understand? The easy course, the happy course, would be to let things drift. Every instinct is calling to me to take that course—to go on as I have gone, trading on Chilcote's weakness and your generosity. But I won't do it. I can't do it!" With a swift impulse he loosed his arms and held her away from him. "Eve, it's the first time I have put another human being before myself."

Eve kept her head bent. Painful, inaudible sobs were shaking her from head to foot.

"It's something in you, something unconscious, something high and fine, that holds me back, that literally bars the way. Eve, can't you see that I'm fighting—fighting hard?"

After he had spoken these words in silence, a long, painful silence, during which Eve waged the battle that so many of her sex have waged before, the battle in which words are useless and tears of no account. She looked very slight, very young, very forlorn, as she stood there. Then, in the oppressive sense of waiting that filled the whole room, she looked up at him. Her face was stained with tears; her thick, black lashes were still wet with them, but her expression, as her eyes met Loder's, was a strange example of the courage, the firmness, the power of sacrifice that may be hidden in a fragile vessel.

She said nothing, for in such a moment words do not come easily, but with the simplest, most submissive, most eloquent gesture in the world she set his perplexity to rest.

Taking his hand between hers, she lifted it and for a long, silent space held it against her lips.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FOR awhile there was silence; then Loder, bitterly aware that he had conquered, poignantly conscious of the appeal that Eve's attitude made, found further endurance impossible. Gently freeing his hand, he moved away from her to the fireplace, taking up the position that she had first occupied.

"Eve," he said slowly, "I haven't finished yet. I haven't said everything. I'm going to tax your courage further."

With a touch of pained alarm, Eve lifted her head. "Further?" she said.

Loder shrank from the expression on her face. "Yes," he said with difficulty, "there's still another point to be faced. The matter doesn't end with my going back. To have the situation fully saved Chilcote must return—Chilcote must be brought to realize his responsibilities."

Eve's lips parted in dumb dismay.

"It must be done," he went on hurriedly, "and we have got to do it—yours and I." He turned and looked at her.

"I? I could do nothing. What could I do?" Her voice faltered.

"Everything," he said. "You could do everything. He is morally weak, but he has one sensitive point—the fear of a public exposure. Once make it plain to him that you know his secret and you can compel him to whatever course of action you select. It was to ask you to do this—to beg you to do this—that I came to you tonight. I know that it's demanding more than a woman's resolution—more than a woman's strength. But you are like no woman in the world!"

"Eve," he cried, with sudden vehemence, "can't you see that it's imperative—the one thing to save us both?"

He stopped abruptly as if he had begun, and a painful silence filled the room. Then, as before, Eve moved instinctively toward him, but this time her steps were slow and uncertain. Nearing his side, she put out her hand as if for comfort and support and, feeling his fingers tighten round it, stood for a moment resting in the contact.

"I understand," she said at last very slowly. "I understand. When will you take me to him?"

For a moment Loder said nothing, not daring to trust his voice. Then he answered low and abruptly. "Now!"

He said, "Now, at once! Now, this moment, if I may. And—and remember that I know what it costs you." As if imbued with fear that his courage might fail him, he suddenly released her hand, and, crossing the room to where a long, dark cloak lay as she had thrown it on her return home, he picked it up, walked to her side and silently wrapped it about her. Then, still acting automatically, he moved to the door, opened it and stood aside while she passed out into the corridor.

In complete silence they descended the stairs and passed to the hall door. There Crapham, who had returned to his duties since Loder's entrance, came quickly forward with an offer of service.

But Loder dismissed him curtly, and, with something of the confusion bred of Chilcote's regime, the man drew back toward the staircase.

involuntarily they turned toward each other.

"Come," Loder said abruptly. "It's only across the road."

Fleet street is generally very quiet once midnight is passed, and Eve had no need of guidance or protection as they crossed the pavement, shining like ice in the lamplight. They crossed it slowly, walking apart, for the dread of physical contact that had possessed them in the cab seemed to have fallen on them again.

Inquisitiveness has little place in the region of the city, and they gained the opposite footpath unobserved by the casual passerby. Then, still holding apart, they reached and entered Clifford's inn.

Inside the entrance they paused, and Eve shivered involuntarily. "How gray it is!" she said faintly. "And how cold! Like a graveyard."

Loder turned to her. For one moment control seemed shaken. His blood surged, his vision clouded. The sense that life and love were still within his reach filled him overwhelmingly. He turned toward Eve; he half extended his hands. Then, stirred by what impulse, moved by what instinct, it was impossible to say, he let them drop to his sides again.

"Come!" he said. "Come! This is the way. Keep close to me. Put your hand on my arm."

He spoke quietly, but his eyes were resolutely averted from her face as they crossed the dim, silent court.

Entering the gloomy doorway that led to his own rooms, he felt his fingers tremble on his arm, then tighten in their pressure as the bare passage and cheerless stairs met her view, but he set his lips.

"Come!" he repeated in the same strained voice. "Come! It isn't far—three or four flights."

With a white face and a curious expression in her eyes Eve moved forward. She had released Loder's arm as they crossed the hall, and now, reaching the stairs, she put out her hand gropingly and caught the banister. She had a pained, numb sense of submission, of suffering that had sunk to apathy. Moving forward without resistance, she began to mount the stairs. The ascent was made in silence. Loder went first, his shoulders braced, his head held erect. Eve, mechanically watchful of all his movements, followed a step or two behind. With weary monotony one flight of stairs succeeded another, each to her unaccustomed eyes seeming more colorless, more solitary, more desolate than the preceding one.

Then at last, with a sinking sense of apprehension, she realized that their goal was reached.

The knowledge broke sharply through her dulled senses, and, confronted by the closeness of her ordeal, she paused, her head lifted, her hand still nervously grasping the banister. Her lips parted as if in sudden demand for aid, but in the nervous expectation, the pained



"Chilcote is dead."

apprehension of the moment, no sound escaped them. Loder, resolutely crossing the landing, knew nothing of the silent appeal.

For a second she stood hesitating; then her own weakness, her own shrinking dismay, were submerged in the interest of his movements. Slowly mounting the remaining steps, she followed him as if fascinated toward the door that showed dimly conspicuous in the light of an unshaded gas jet.

Almost at the moment that she reached his side he extended his hand toward the door. The action was decisive and hurried, as though he feared to trust himself.

For a space he fumbled with the lock. And Eve, standing close behind him, heard the handle creak and turn under his pressure. Then he shook the door.

At last, slowly, almost reluctantly, he turned round. "I'm afraid things aren't quite right," he said in a low voice. "The door is locked, and I can see no light."

She raised her eyes quickly. "But you have a key?" she whispered. "Have you got a key?" It was obvious that to both the unexpected check to their designs was fraught with danger.

"Yes, but—" He looked toward the door. "Yes, I have a key. Yes, you're right," he added quickly. "I'll use it. Wait while I go inside."

Filled with a new nervousness, oppressed by the loneliness, the silence about her, Eve drew back obediently. The sense of mystery conveyed by the closed door weighed upon her. Her susceptibilities were tensely alert as she watched Loder search for his key and insert it in the lock. With mingled dread and curiosity she saw the door yield and gap open like a black gash in the dingy wall, and with a sudden sense of desertion she saw him pass through the aperture and heard him strike a match.

The wait that followed seemed extraordinarily long. Listening intently,

she heard him move softly from one room to the other. And at last, to her acutely nervous susceptibilities, it seemed that he paused in absolute silence. In the intensity of listening she heard her own faint, irregular breathing, and the sound filled her with panic. The quiet, the solitude, the vague, instinctive apprehension, became suddenly unendurable. Then all at once the tension was relieved. Loder reappeared.

He paused for a second in the shadowy doorway; then he turned unsteadily, drew the door and locked it.

Eve stepped forward. Her glimpse of him had been momentary—and she had not heard his voice—yet the consciousness of his bearing filled her with instinctive alarm. Abruptly and without reason her hands turned cold, her heart began to beat violently. "John!" she said below her breath.

For answer he moved toward her. His face was bereft of color; there was a look of consternation in his eyes. "Come," he said. "Come at once. I must take you home." He spoke in a shaken, uneven voice.

Eve, looking up at him, caught his hand. "Why? Why?" she questioned. Her tone was low and scared.

Without replying he drew her imperatively toward the stairs. "Go very softly," he commanded. "No one must see you here."

In the first moment she obeyed him instinctively; then, reaching the head of the stairs, she stopped. With one hand still clasping his, the other clinging nervously to the banister, she refused to descend. "John, she whispered, "I'm not a child. What is it? What has happened? I must know."

For a moment Loder looked at her uncertainly; then, reading the expression in her eyes, he yielded to her demand.

"He's dead," he said in a very low voice. "Chilcote is dead."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TO fully appreciate a great announcement we must have time at our disposal. At the moment of Loder's disclosure time was denied to Eve, for scarcely had the words left his lips before the thought that dominated him asserted its prior claim. Blind to the incredulity in her eyes, he drew her swiftly forward and—half impelling, half supporting her—forced her to descend the stairs.

Never in after life could he obliterate the remembrance of that descent. Fear, such as he could never experience in his own concerns, possessed him. One desire overrode all others, the desire that Eve's reputation, which he himself had so nearly imperiled, should remain unimpaired. In the shadow of that urgent duty, the despair of the past hours, the appalling fact so lately realized, the future, with its possible trials, became dark to his imagination. In his new victory over self the question of her protection predominated.

Moving under his compulsion, he guided her hastily and silently down the deserted stairs, drawing a breath of deep relief as one after another the landings were successively passed, and, still actuated by the suppressed need of haste, he passed through the doorway that they had entered under such different conditions only a few minutes before.

To leave the quiet court, to gain the Strand, to hall a belated hansom, was the work of a moment. By an odd contrivance of circumstance the luck that had attended every phase of his dual life was again exerted in his behalf. No one had noticed their entry into Clifford's inn; no one was moved to curiosity by their exit. With an involuntary thrill of feeling he gave expression to his relief.

"Thank God it's over!" he said as a cab drew up. "You don't know what the strain has been."

Moving as if in a dream, Eve stepped into the cab. As yet the terrible discomposure to their enterprise had made no clear impression upon her mind. For the moment all that she was conscious of, all that she instinctively acknowledged, was the fact that Loder was still beside her.

In quiet confidence she took her place, drawing aside her skirts to make room for him, and in the same subdued manner he stepped into the vehicle. Then, with the strange sensation of relying on their earlier drive, they were aware of the tightened rein and of the horse's first forward movement.

For several seconds neither spoke. Eve, shutting out all other thoughts, sat close to Loder, clinging tenaciously to the momentary comforting sense of protection. Loder, striving to marshal his ideas, hesitated before the ordeal of speech. At last, realizing his responsibility, he turned to her slowly.

"Eve," he said in a low voice and with some hesitation, "I want you to know that in all this—from the moment I saw him—from the moment I understood—I have had you in my thoughts and no one else."

She raised her eyes to his face.

"Do you realize?" he began afresh. "Do you know what this—this thing means?"

Still she remained silent.

"It means that after tonight there will be no such person in London as John Loder. Tomorrow that name will be known by that name will be removed. It will be stated that he died of an overdose of morphia. His charwoman will identify him as a solitary man who lived respectively for years and then suddenly went down hill with remarkable speed. It will be quite a common case. Nothing of interest will be found in his rooms. No relation will claim his body. After the usual time he will be given the usual burial of his class. These details are horrible, but there are times when we must look at the horrible side of life, because life is incomplete without it."

"These things I speak of are the things that will meet the casual eye, but in our sight they will have a very different meaning."

"Eve," he said, more vehemently, "a whole chapter in my life has been closed

tonight, and my first instinct is to shut the book and throw it away. But I'm thinking of you. Remember, I'm thinking of you. Whatever the trial, whatever the difficulty, no harm shall come to you. You have my word for that."

"I'll return with you now to Grosvenor square. I'll remain there till a reasonable excuse can be given for Chilcote's going abroad. I will avoid France. I will cut politics—whatever the cost. Then at the first reasonable moment I will do what I would do now, tonight, if it were possible. I'll go away, start afresh; do in another country what I have done in this."

There was a long silence; then Eve turned to him. The apathy of a moment before had left her face. "In another country?" she repeated. "In another country?"

"Yes, a fresh career in a fresh country, something clean to offer you. I'm not too old to do what other men have done."

He paused, and for a moment Eve looked ahead at the gleaming chain of lamps. Then very slowly she brought her glance back again. "No," she said very slowly. "You are not too old. But there are times when age—and things like age—are not the real consideration. It seems to me that your own inclination, your own individual sense of right and wrong, has nothing to do with the present moment. The question is whether you are justified in going away"—she paused, her eyes fixed steadily upon his—"whether you are free to go away and make a new life, whether it is ever justifiable to follow a phantom light when there's a lantern waiting to be carried." Her breath caught. She drew away from him, frightened and elated by her own words.

Loder turned to her sharply. "Eve!" he exclaimed; then his tone changed. "You don't know what you're saying," he added quickly. "You don't understand what you're saying."

Eve leaned forward again. "Yes," she said slowly. "I do understand." Her voice was controlled, her manner convinced. She was no longer the girl conquered by strength greater than her own. She was the woman strenuously demanding her right to individual happiness.

"I understand it all," she repeated. "I understand every point. It was not chance that made you change your identity, that made you care for me, that brought about—his death. I don't believe it was chance. I believe it was something much higher. You are not meant to go away."

As Loder watched her the remembrance of his first days at Chilcote rose again, the remembrance of how he had been dimly filled with the belief that below her self possession lay a strength—a depth—uncommon in woman. As he studied her now in the instinctive belief flamed into conviction. "Eve!" he said involuntarily.

With a quick gesture she raised her head. "No," she exclaimed. "No; don't say anything. You are going to see things as I see them—you must do so—you have no choice. No real man ever casts away the substance for the shadow." Her eyes shone—the color, the glow, the vitality, rushed back into her face.

"John," she said softly, "I love you, and I need you, but there is something with a greater claim—a greater need than mine. Don't you know what it is?"

He said nothing. He made no gesture.

"It is the party—the country. You may put love aside, but duty is different. You have pledged yourself. You are not meant to draw back."

Loder's lips parted.

"Don't," she said again. "Don't say anything. I know all that is in your mind. Do you realize? Do you realize that it isn't my love—or our happiness—that's really in the balance. It is your future." Her voice thrilled. "You are going to be a great man, and a great man is the property of his country. He has no right to individual action."

Again Loder made an effort to speak, but again she checked him.

"Wait!" she exclaimed. "Wait! You believe you have acted wrongly, and you are desperately afraid of acting wrongly again. But it is really true, more loyal for us to work out a long probation in grooves that are already overfilled than to marry quietly abroad and fill the places that have need of us? That is the question I want you to answer. Is it really truer and nobler?

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