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## IN AN EVIL MOMENT.

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## CHAPTER VIII.—(CONTINUED.)

"And pray, Miss Propriety, what is that?" from Tom.

"Why, you get all the papers from London, and read all about the theatres and people and dreadful places. Why, only the other day, I found in your study"—she pronounced the word with supreme contempt, and the echo of her laugh hovered among the gilded leaves—"a paper that contained nothing else but theatrical news. You can't deny that, can you?"

"I do not deny it. But do you know why I had that paper?"

"How should I know anything about it?"

"I bought it," Tom said, solemnly, "to see which were the best theatres to take you to when we go to London on our honeymoon."

"Oh, pa! You don't know what a story he is telling. He has bought that paper every week since he has been in Sewton. I'm sure," she added, pursing her lips, "it would be much better for him were he to spend his time in reading some of those big books he has in his room. I declare that there are two great volumes there never cut yet."

In reply, Tom, with a rich mellow voice, sang:

"My only books,  
Were woman's locks,  
And folly's all they're taught me."

"That," said Lily, "is apparent to every one." Then changing her bantering tone, she asked him whether he would really like to make it his home?

"I assure you that I should," he replied; "but I don't care about leading so lazy a life. I must get down to some town where there is a chance of obtaining a decent practice."

"Tut tut!" said Walter, "why do you always harp upon that string? Why need you bother about getting a big practice? No, no, my boy, make up your mind to remain here, if you both wish to—remain here at least until—until I am dead."

"I should not like to leave dear old Sewton," Lily acknowledged, pensively. "I have been so very happy here."

"Then," said Tom, decisively, "Sewton let it be. 'I wish though,' he added, 'that we could get up a joint-stock company to import a few more people here. I don't consider that I'm treated fairly. I'm legally licensed to slay, and there's no one here to kill. I'm not doing my duty to the sapient college that has had the wisdom to make me one of its members.'"

"Don't grumble," said Lily; "you can keep your hand in by practicing on Father Time. You are a capital hand at killing it."

"I expect I am almost as quiet here as I should have been had I carried out my original scheme."

"What was that?" Lily enquired.

"Did I never tell you? As a youngster, you know, I was very fond of reading travels and adventures in strange countries; indeed I promised to be such a rover myself that my dear mother was in a constant state of terror lest I should run away to sea. When I was a lad at school I determined I would travel the moment I got my degree."

"You were not very enthusiastic then," said Lily. "Most lads would not think of waiting."

"Ah! 'I was a steady fife, you see.'"

"And pray where did you think of setting up your gravestone, as you call that fearfully ugly plate of yours?"

"Well, I had a great fancy for New Zealand. I am told that some of the scenery—"

Tom was interrupted by a sharp, sudden cry from Mr. Barr. The old gentleman turned upon him, his voice and manner exhibiting the utmost consternation. His face was pale, and his eyes staring; his forehead was bedewed with moisture.

"What—what!" he ejaculated, his limbs trembling. "What do you know about New Zealand?"

"Nothing," Tom commenced.

"Never let me hear you speak of it again," Walter went on with nervous energy, "the place is accursed. Never think of going there, or of—of—taking Lily there."

Promise me that—promise me on your most solemn oath."

"I will do anything," Tom answered readily, regarding this sudden outburst with some alarm, and anxious to calm the excited old gentleman, "I will do anything you wish."

"As you love that girl," Walter went on, "never talk about it, never think about it, never dream about it—"

"It was only a foolish, boyish notion," Tom hastened to explain, "I have long since given up all thought of going there—"

"That's right, that's right; and you will keep your word?" The old, old childish notion will not return, eh? You are sure it will not return?"

"Quite, quite, Mr. Barr. Come, take my hand upon it. I am sorry I have disturbed you. Let us forget that the place was ever mentioned. Let us forget that it exists."

"Ay," the old man echoed, and repeated many times to himself, "let us forget that it exists. Let us forget that it exists."

Then Lily, who had witnessed with great grief this return of one of the attacks from which her father had for some time been free, took her father's arm, and led him into the house.

She motioned Tom to remain behind. She had an idea—and it was a just one—that her father would more quickly recover his accustomed calmness if he were left alone with her.

Tom pondered long and deeply over the scene that had just been enacted.

Was Mr. Barr the victim of some mental delusion, or was there a terrible secret connected with his past? Tom could not decide, but he was fully convinced of one thing. If Walter Barr's past was shadowed by a crime, he was the victim, not the culprit. Walter Barr, he was prepared to swear, was incapable of willingly inflicting injury upon any living creature.

During the rest of the afternoon Walter remained very silent. His features were composed, and he appeared perfectly calm, but his manner was that of a man occupied with some deep thought.

More than once Tom endeavoured to draw him out, but Mr. Barr invariably replied in monosyllables, evidently designed to discourage continuous conversation.

As the light of the day faded, and the poplars in front of the house threw long black shadows across the lawn, and queer forms appeared to be lurking among the hedges, Lily and Tom stood at the open window watching the purple film of cloud gradually spread itself over the sky.

Mr. Barr had thrown himself upon a sofa which stood in the gloom of one of the corners of the room, and, from his deep, regular breathing, it appeared that he was sleeping heavily.

"There are times," said Lily, "when I feel very, very miserable."

"Miserable?" Tom repeated, "surely little one, you have nothing to make you unhappy?"

Then he added softly, "Is this one of those times?"

"I am afraid so, darling," nestling her face in his coat, and speaking in a low, soft voice.

"Why, what on earth have you to make you melancholy now?"

"Sometimes I think that it is only my great happiness. It is very foolish of me, I know, but I can't help it. You will call me fanciful and childish, but really, love, the feeling is too strong for me to conquer. I have been so very, very happy lately, Tom, and, discontented little stupid that I am, the longer that happiness lasts the more I dread lest it should suddenly be destroyed. Supposing anything should happen, Tom, wouldn't it be awful?"

"What can happen, darling? Surely you are getting sentimental over the dying day. I won't let you stand here any longer. Come over to your piano and knock off one of those jolly tunes of yours, and that will soon clear your mind of those morbid fancies."

"I won't disturb papa," she said, gravely. "I am sure that sleeping will do him good."

Even as she spoke the man upon the sofa

twisted and turned as one in agony; his breath came quicker and shorter, and a moan escaped him.

They could not see him writhing, but they heard him move, and they distinguished that he had a difficulty in breathing. They kept quite silent. Lily scarcely breathed.

Suddenly a scream from him made them first start away, and then run to his side. As they did so he was struggling with some imaginary enemy.

"I did not do it," he cried in piercing tones, "I did not do it! My God—my God—"

His arms were gesticulating wildly, and with a view to calming him, Tom endeavoured to hold these down. The moment the dreaming man felt that he had something tangible to battle with, he wrestled with redoubled vigour. Tom, strong as he was, could not hold Walter down. During the struggle, Lily, who was greatly alarmed, had rung for light. As the servant illuminated the room, Barr, with a supernatural effort, sprang to his feet. The sudden blaze showed him battling fiercely with Tom, his eyes starting from his head, and every vein upon his forehead like a silken cord. Lily stood powerless, watching them with the most intense anxiety, the wondering servant, as terrified as her mistress, remained quaking in the centre of the room.

"Where am I? What is it?" Walter Barr demanded in a dazed way, releasing his grip of Tom's arms.

"I think you have been dreaming," was Tom's answer, spoken breathlessly, for the strength of his antagonist had almost been too great for him.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Barr, sinking down upon the sofa again; "a dream—a dream: a very bad dream!" He looked wildly round him, then he wiped the perspiration from his pallid face, and in a low, apologetic sort of way, added—

"I don't think I am well to-day."

"An undigested piece of cheese or an obstinate bit of cucumber," Tom suggested pleasantly.

Though he spoke so lightly he was studying his friend's expression with much concern.

"That must be it," said Walter, "yes, yes, indigestion does cause these things."

He held his head down for a few minutes, and no one spoke. They were all looking at him very earnestly.

Suddenly he said, rising as he spoke—

"Lily, I am not at all well to-night. I shall go to bed."

She ran to him. He put his arm in hers, and without another word to any one he went from the room.

Tom waited some time for Lily's return, and during her absence his thoughts were occupied with Mr. Barr.

"I must watch him carefully," he said to himself, "there is something very wrong with him. Poor Lily! He must be a little bit gone," he went on cynically and with a slight laugh. "No sane man who had much money would give his only daughter to a fellow scarcely worth what he stands up in."

Perhaps, he added, "I'm scarcely doing the old fellow justice, for he's the most simple-hearted man I have ever met. However, seeing how things go now-a-days, I can't be blamed for thinking a man mad who happens to do a generous action."

When Lily at last returned, she looked very grave, but she made an effort to speak cheerfully.

"He is quieter now," she said, "and I think that he will sleep well. I am terribly distressed to see a return of these fits. I thought that they had gone for ever. Can nothing be done?"

"Oh yes, darling," Tom answered, with a confidence he did not feel. "We can do a great deal for him. But do you know, little one, I do not think that you have any cause for anxiety. This will pass off by the morning. You cannot expect," he added, "these attacks to end all at once. I was afraid myself that we should get a return of them. Of course it is a great thing to have a long interval between the attacks. Ultimately I hope they will cease altogether."

"But, what can we do, what can we do?" Lily cried impatiently.

"Keep him from everything likely to irritate him, and give him plenty of change. He has shut himself up here too long."

"Where can we take him?"

"Anywhere so long as it's a change. I tell you what," Tom went on, "if he's all right to-morrow, I'll drive him over to Rarnalearn. You know it's the first day of the Fair, and

the bustle will cheer him up. What do you think of that proposal?"

"Capital," she cried, forgetting for a moment her trouble, and even clapping her hands, "and I should so much like to go myself."

"Then that's settled."

"If he's well. I won't go on any account if he isn't better."

"Of course not. I'll go up and see him before I leave, and if he wants it, I'll give him a sleeping draught."

"Wasn't it funny," said Lily presently, in that grave way she sometimes had "that just as I was talking about feeling so wretched and fearful, he should—"

Tom chided her for encouraging morbid thoughts. She could not finish her sentence, for he kissed her words away.

"The old fellow wants a complete rousing up," Tom soliloquised, as he walked home in the moonlight, "indeed, I don't think that a regular spree would do him any harm. Well, we'll see how he gets on at the Fair, to-morrow."

In the long days of sorrow that followed, he often cursed himself for ever proposing this excursion, and he wondered in his agony what demon suggested it to him. Surely, in taking the old man to this miserable Carnival, he was the instrument of Walter Barr's worst genius.

## CHAPTER IX.

## DOWN IN THE WORLD.

"You're right, Boss; them double events is a bit snarey. But when they do come off—an, when they do!"

The speaker was Mr. Stivrey Blend. Time seemed to have passed him over; many years had elapsed since we last saw him, without leaving any impress upon his features. He had grown a trifle thinner, perhaps, and age had dulled the overpowering glow of his red hair.

As he spoke, he sat in a small, dingy, dusty, untidy auctioneer's office, situated in a cloudy street in the shadiest part of that not too aristocratic district, known to the Londoners as Kentish Town.

The room was very small, and little light entered it, for the window was plastered with announcements of forgotten sales and out-of-date notices. An odour of tobacco and stale beer hung about it, and the central table, round which there was scarcely space for a stout man to walk, was strewn with a strange medley of accounts, greasy ledgers, soiled letters, damaged envelopes, racing calendars, crumbs of cheese and bread, and fishing-hooks. In one corner a narrow, twisted staircase led to an upper apartment, which the proprietor had fitted up as a bedroom, severe y simple in its appointments.

Opposite to this dwarf of a shop a decayed, sullen-looking, public Hall frowned upon the dismal street, and increased its natural gloom. Here, every Saturday evening, the flabbiest youths of the neighbourhood met together, and gave, what they, with a cynical humour, were pleased to term, an "Entertainment."

To this exhibition of their qualifications for Colney Hatch they, with a reckless wit, irresistible in its darning, invited the public; and, moreover, in their boundless mirth, they suggested that the said public should pay for the privilege at the rate of threepence, sixpence, and ninepence, according to the position of the seat occupied. Here, too, every Wednesday, a certain number of the oiliest of the tradesmen of the vicinity assembled in a mouldy room, and with much circumspection and solemnity discussed the affairs of "THE GREAT NORTH-WEST BUILDING AND MUTUAL BENEFIT SOCIETY."

A clumsy and badly-lettered board affixed to one of the pillars of the portico of the building, informed these anxious to avail themselves of the countless benefits to be derived from joining this flourishing society, that the printed rules and all information could be obtained upon applying to Mr. Gregory Axon, auctioneer, valuer, and debt collector, opposite. In smaller letters at the foot were the words, "Agent for the Guarantee Insurance Company."

Mr. Stivrey Blend sat on one side of the table, and Mr. Axon on the other. Mr. Blend wore a rough, long coat, several sizes too large for him, and boasting very formidable buttons. As he finished the sentence with which we have opened this chapter, he bent down and studied with apparently the keenest interest a sadly battered felt hat, which he was slowly turning round upon the knob of a plant ash stick he held in one of his knotty hands.

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