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IN AN EVIL MOMENT.

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CHAPTER IX.—(CONTINUED.)

Mr. Axon was lighting his pipe. He watched, without comment, Blend take a pewter measure from a sly recess in one of the corners, and leave the office.

Poor Stivey Blend had, in New Zealand, always regarded Mr. Axon with admiration; and his reverence became indestructible when the object of it assisted him to return to England.

There was not so much generosity in this action as might at first sight appear; Mr. Axon journeyed by the same vessel, and he made Blend work—work hard—for him during the passage home.

"There," said Stivey, as he placed the metal pot, now filled with stout, before Mr. Axon, "take a pull at that."

Mr. Axon "did take a pull at it," but such a prodigiously long one that, when the measure was returned to the generous man who had paid for the filling of it, there was scarcely sufficient liquor left to satisfy the legitimate wants of the smallest of the smallest of the feathered tribe.

Mr. Blend gravely allowed it to moisten his lips, and he returned the vessel to the table with an air of such intense satisfaction that, had you seen him, you would have felt convinced that he had imbibed a hearty and highly invigorating draught.

"If you rumble against Mr. Barr now," Stivey mused, "he'd be the chap to help you."

"If I could find Walter Barr," cried Gregory, with sudden vehemence, again striking the table, "I should be a made man!"

He checked himself abruptly, and looked suspiciously at the man opposite to him. Then he added, with an attempt at appearing more indifferent, and with a low, ugly laugh—

"I suppose he would give me a hand, and not turn his back on me like the other cures."

"You bet he would. He's like yourself—one of the best. I'd back you two for the double event of the Good-Natured Stakes and the Generous Plate—leastways, if I could get any one soft enough to lay against you."

"I wonder whether he's still alive!" Gregory muttered, knitting his brows and gnawing at the mouthpiece of his pipe.

"It's even better," Stivey replied, decisively. "When you tried to fish him out they told you that he had sold all his property and gone abroad—no one knew where. Because you don't happen to have met him, it don't follow that he's dead. It's a good many years ago, though," the speaker went on reflectively; "and he never was very strong. No, it isn't even. The odds are against him being alive. What a game it would be if he did turn up—what a game!"

An evil light flashed from Gregory's eyes, and a cruel smile played around his thick lips.

Then as though anxious to change the conversation, he asked:

"Well, what brought you up here this morning, Stivey?"

Mr. Blend moved uneasily on his chair, and carefully brushed his old felt hat with the sleeve of his coat before answering.

"Fact 'a, Boss," he said, presently, "I'm regularly cleared out this time. It's a clean bust-up, and Overend Gurney ain't in it."

Axon endeavored to look sympathetic, and failed. The soft pleasant smile that had once won the hearts of women and the confidence of men had become an unpleasant leer, which seemed to swell the sufferings of those he would affect to pity.

It's a bad job, Stivey—a very bad job," he said. "I hope," he added, a little anxiously, "that the shows all right?"

"The show, Boss, is just all wrong," Stivey replied, lugubriously, "and that's where the trouble comes in."

"You don't mean to say," Axon cried, that you've sold it and lost the money?"

"Not quite so bad as that, boss—not quite so bad as that." He spoke slowly, and mournfully wagged his spiky head from side to side. "But very nigh, boss, very nigh."

"You're an unfortunate devil, Stivey."

"I've mortgaged it," Stivey went on, "that's what I've done. I've mortgaged the

lot to Billy Hurst, of the Dragon Green, and he won't let me stir a step with it until the coin is paid. There's the Indian rat, a regular pinlog himself away for want of the change; the jackal ain't the same instructive little animal he was a week ago," tears trickled down Mr. Stivey's cheeks as he proceeded. "The very serpent looks as if he'd like to take a dose of prussic acid. As for the pony, he'd make a splendid mule at a horse's funeral, he would. His spirits have all evaporated."

Mr. Blend, since his return to England, had embarked in the show line. His collection was not very extensive. But, as he would with great vehemence insist, everything in his world-renowned establishment was "alive!—alive!"

"What have you done with the girl?" Gregory asked.

"The Zulu maiden?" Stivey queried, looking up through his tears. "Oh," he added, in a tone of the most supreme contempt, "she and the African chief are eating their heads off at the Green Dragon."

This was Mr. Blend's enigmatical manner of explaining that at present they were eating and drinking and being merry and doing nothing.

"In fact," he went on, "if they don't soon leave their heads will be too large for the door."

Taken literally, this speech could scarcely be said to agree with the previous one; but Mr. Blend simply meant to say that soon their hotel bill would be so heavy that he would not be able to pay it and release them.

"You have made a mess of it this time," was Axon's consoling remark.

"I have so," agreed Stivey, with an air of melancholy satisfaction, as though it were some consolation to reflect that he had done the thing thoroughly. "You see," he continued, "there's Rarnabarn fair next week, and if I could only get the Institution down there I should be right for the winter. There is a lot of fairs all around about between this and Christmas."

When I'd done em all I should work my way into Cornwall—that's the best part of England you know, Boss, for my game."

"It's a good part in the summer," Axon allowed.

"In the winter too," Stivey persisted, "one of the best."

"I suppose," said Axon, "that you wanted me to help you to pay off the mortgage on the Institution as you call it?"

As he spoke his eye fell upon a roll of silver and one half-sovereign, which lay at the bottom of a narrow drawer in the table before him. He looked up at Stivey suspiciously; it was evident that the showman had not seen the little hoard. Keeping his eyes fixed on Stivey's face he gently closed this drawer, locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

"I did think of that," Stivey replied, slowly; "but of course, as things is so bad with you, its no use talking about it."

"I don't forget," said Axon, with a return of his old blandness, "that I owe you a trifle."

"Well, say nothing about that now," Mr. Blend interrupted with dignity. "Is it likely? Don't I know you'd be the first to pay me if you had it? What I was going to say is just this: that stout took all the money I had. If you've got a trifle about you, I shouldn't mind getting a bit of dinner, and then I'd go on as far as Billy's, and see if I couldn't come to terms with him."

Mr. Axon thrust his hand into one of the pockets of his trousers, and pulled out a shilling. He threw this on the table, saying:

"There you are, old fellow; that's every half-penny that I possess; but you can take it. I haven't dined myself; but I dare say something will turn up during the day."

Stivey rose from his seat, and he pressed his hat well over his eyes. He took Gregory's hand, and placed the shilling into it. In a voice thick with emotion he muttered:

"No, no, Gregory, I'm not one of that sort." Giving his friend's hand a prodigious squeeze, he darted into the street, saying to

himself, as he walked rapidly along, and the tears filled his eyes:

"What a sort! what a sort! There's not many like Gregory Axon!"

The object of his admiration, when he found himself alone, very carefully replaced the shilling in his pocket, and added to it a handful of silver he had concealed in the drawer. Then he yawned, knocked the ashes from his pipe, stretched himself, and, remarking that dinner was a capital idea, he locked up the office and proceeded to a well known hostelry in Camden Town, where he enjoyed a substantial meal. The repast was followed by a couple of glasses of brandy and water, and the rest of the afternoon he dawdled away in the billiard-room.

CHAPTER X.

THE TROUBLE BEGINS.

"We couldn't have had a better day had we ordered it ourselves; if you don't care about stopping to see the Fair, the drive will do you any amount of good."

The speaker was Tom Westall. He had arrived at Lily's house before either she or her father had left their bed-rooms; and he now stood with Walter Barr at the open window, gazing into the leafy leafy distance.

It was, indeed, a delightful morning; the sky was deeply, deeply blue without one fleck of a cloud; a soft golden light flooded the fields; mellowed the woods; brought the hill-tops into rare distinctiveness; and played upon the water until it dazzled and blinded one. The trees nodded and smiled as the slight breeze brought them sweet scents; the happy flowers vied with each other in exposing their charms; and there was the glad chorus of birds to make the universal feeling of thankfulness and joy complete.

"I haven't much taste for noise," Walter replied gravely; "but as you say, the drive will do me good. It would not be easy to stop in doors such a day as this."

"You look a little better this morning"—Tom, as he spoke, eyed his friend's face critically—"but you are not yourself—not by a long way."

"I am much better," Walter protested, "much better. But," he was compelled to confess, after a little pause, "I am a little weak and—and my head seems dazed. What's that?"

He uttered the exclamation in sudden terror. He seized Tom's arm as though for protection, and trembled in every limb.

"It's nothing," Tom returned, quickly soothing him. "Only the postman banging the gate after him."

"How foolish of me!" Mr. Barr's breath came quickly, and his face had not yet lost that scared look. "Every little noise startles me."

Tom looked perplexed.

"You want a complete change," he said thoughtfully, "and a complete change you must have."

"Yes, yes," Walter hurriedly agreed, "I want a change, and—"

"Hullo!" Tom cried, interrupting him, "here's Lily looking, in her brightness, a veritable daughter of old Sol himself."

The compliment was not undeserved. Her eyes sparkled with health and buoyancy; her dimpled cheeks were rosy, mischievous; and her hair, unconfined, fell upon her shoulders a rippling mass of gold.

"Tom," she exclaimed, as she ran towards him, "I didn't know that you were here."

"I've been here two good hours," he answered, after kissing her, "and I began to think that neither of you ever were going to get up. It's past nine o'clock," he went on, consulting his watch, "the day will be gone before we start."

"I overslept myself, but we will have breakfast at once. I've got some fish for your breakfast. Papa and I know you'll like that."

Mr. Barr smiled faintly, and promised to eat a hearty meal, but though the grey mullet was deliciously cooked, he scarcely touched it.

"And so," said Lily, presently, "we are really going to the Fair. It will be jolly," she cried with childish glee. "I've heard such a lot about Fairs, and I've never seen one yet. This one at Rarnabarn, you know, is very celebrated. It lasts three days," she rattled on, "and it is opened with all sorts of mystic ceremonies. They mustn't sell any horses or open any of the shows until twelve o'clock to-day. Then the mayor, all in his robes, drops a glove from the window of the Town Hall into the street, and the fun commences. Before that

there's hot spiced ale and cake prepared in the Council-room for anyone who likes to have it, and everybody keeps open house."

"You appear to know all about it, Lily," said her father, smiling upon her a little sadly.

"The gratuitous cake and eleemosynary ale appear to have impressed Lily's mind," Tom broke in.

"Peggy told me all about it," said the young lady, answering her father, and only deigning to bestow upon her lover a contemptuous toss of her golden shower.

Rarnabarn, when they reached it, was in a feverish, and somewhat alcoholic state of excitement. Most of the shops were closed. It was impossible to drive through the principal streets in consequence of the crowds of gaily-decorated horses, led by bronzed, powerful, nuley men. Nor was it very pleasant walking, for the carter and the groom, in their anxiety to exhibit the paces of the animals they had for sale, ran their charges through the thoroughfares with the smallest possible regard for the safety of the foot passengers. To lovers of horseflesh it was, however, a glorious sight, for animals of every shade of excellence were here; not unmixed, it must be confessed, with some of the sorriest crooks that ever escaped the knacker's yard. Amiable, chubby cart-horses, capable of prodigious exertion, whose coats shone in the sun, and whose tails were wonderful specimens of the plaiter's dexterity; trim roadsters neatly groomed, solid coos with curt tails, thinking not a little of themselves; and fetching some thirty or forty pounds; frolicsome ponies with long waving manes and sweeping tails; useful hacks, unostentatious, but valuable for all that; haughty hunters, with restless legs and flashing eyes; every variety of carriage horse; here and there a dusky donkey; in queer corners, the ubiquitous goat; and dogs everywhere.

Then in another part of the town you could have your choice of red, sturdy Devonshire cattle, and of sheep beloved by the epicure. If you were for none of these, there were the shows and the circus; the gingerbread stalls; the rifle galleries; the swings, the niggers, the music, the gypsies, and the itinerant photographers.

"We will get out of this as soon as we can," Tom whispered to Lily, as he cautiously drove through the less-frequented streets towards the head hotel.

"Too much noise for him, I'm afraid," he added.

"I should so much like to see the shows," she confessed, also, in an undertone.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE OLD QUEEN.

CHAPTER II.

It was done; the axe had fallen. The queen's dignity was saved, but her heart was broken. She was at her harpichord when they brought her tidings of Essex's execution. Her face was turned from the light, and no one saw the spasm of pain that convulsed its stern lineaments. She did not pause even for an instant, but her hand was dashed violently on the instrument, sending forth a harsh, sharp note, that was almost a wail, and then the soft music gushed forth again, sweetly, as if nothing had happened. Alas! how slight are sometimes the indications which a proud heart allows the world to see of those struggles that pass through the soul like an earthquake. That moment had left the haughtiest woman, and the most imperious queen that trod the soil of England, utterly desolate.

"What ho! what ho! Who claims admittance to the palace at this late hour?" cried the yeoman of the guard, as he arose, an hour after midnight, to answer an abrupt summons at the great portal which opened to the Thames. A few words from without, of explanation and entreaty, soon prevailed upon the guard to admit the untimely visitor, who paused by the entrance, and taking the yeoman on one side, spoke to him earnestly for some moments.

"What! the old Countess of Nottingham dying, and would have speech of her grace," exclaimed the royal door-keeper. "Why, think you the queen would arise from her couch, at this hour of the night, and risk her sacred person on the water at the behest of fifty dying Countesses?"

"I tell you," rejoined the man, whose face was pale with excitement, "I tell you, this message of my dying mistress must be

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