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# IN AN EVIL MOMENT.

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Author of "A Willy Woman," "The Bloom o' the Heather," "When the Clock Stopped," "Magic Morsels," &c.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

A GENTLEMAN OF WEALTH AND POSITION.

"He's generally home afore this. I never knew him to be so late. It's queer."

The speaker was Silas, the vendor of baked potatoes whose oven, it will be remembered, stood all night at the top of the street in which Walter Barr lived. It was nearly three o'clock in the morning; the person he addressed was a woman. Her face was coarse and blotchy and bloated, but even now it was easy to find traces of a long lost beauty in it. Her hair had escaped from its fastening, and was hanging down her back, heightening her wild and disreputable appearance. She wore a tawdry dress, torn and mud-stained. She stood close to the fire, for the night was raw and damp, munching a steaming potato.

"I'll wait a bit, anyhow," she said. "If he does not come soon I must try my luck to-morrow night. Maybe he's gone into the country."

"Two o'clock's about his regular time—not often afore. And so you think he'd help you if you was to meet him?"

"He'd help me," the woman repeated, with a short, jeering laugh, very unpleasant, to hear. "Oh, yes, he'd help me. He couldn't help himself."

"Then why don't you go straight up to the house some morning when you know he's at home?"

"You're very soft," said the woman, with a sneer; "very soft, for a man in your line of business. If I was to do that he'd perhaps tell the servant to turn me away, and if I kicked up a rumpus he'd lock me up. But if I meet him accidentally in the street he'll give me something to get rid of me. Or," she added, in a savage undertone, too low for Silas to hear, "I can give him something and get rid of him for ever."

"That's right enough. And how long is it since you knew him?"

"A matter of twelve or fourteen years ago. That's a powerful long time. D'yethink he'd know you?"

Again the woman gave that grating, jeering laugh.

"The life I've led," she said, "has not improved my looks, I dare say; but he'd know me—oh, yes, he'd know me. I've been five years looking for him," she went on, fiercely—"five long years looking for him day and night, but I've found him at last, and he shall not escape me now. There, don't listen to my wild talk. Give me another spud."

Silas eyed her suspiciously. Handing her the potato, he said, warningly:

"Don't you let your passion run away with your reason. It's a dangerous game you're after."

"What game? What do you mean? I tell you I only want to get a pound or two out of him. You can't blame me for that?"

"No, I don't blame you, if that's all. But just take my advice, and be careful, my girl."

The woman laughed defiantly.

"You take care of yourself. I'll see that I don't get into any mess. I shan't wait any longer. It's no good to-night, I can see that. It's commencing to rain, too. Good night."

Drawing her gaudy shawl more closely round her, she walked unsteadily away.

As she wandered on, she eagerly clutched a something she had concealed in her breast.

"When I do meet you, Gregory," she muttered, "it will be a bad night for you."

"She means mischief," Silas reflected as he watched her retreating form, "that's what she means. Bless if I don't think I ought to warn the gentleman. I will, hang me if I don't. I'll get myself up in gorgeous array in the afternoon, if I don't see him afore I close up business, and give him a call. I knows she means mischief."

Silas kept his resolution. The following afternoon he knocked at Walter Barr's door, and asked for Mr. Axon. He was acquainted with this gentleman's name, for since Lily's disappearance Gregory had often spoken to him upon the subject.

Mr. Axon, Mr. Marl, and Walter were busily discussing some notable scheme for making money elaborated by the fertile brain of the first named, and Mr. Axon left them to speak to Silas with an ill grace.

"Confound the fellow!" he muttered, "what does he want to disturb me now for." Silas stood humbly in the hall, hat in hand.

"Well?" Gregory cried sharply, "what do you want?"

"I should like to have a word in private with you, sir."

The man's earnestness-excited Gregory's curiosity. He led him into a small room at the end of the passage, originally intended to be used as a smoking room. A special apartment of this kind was not required in Mr. Barr's house, for Gregory smoked in every room indifferently.

"Any news of the young lady?" Gregory demanded, after he had carefully closed the door.

"Not of that lady, sir. I've come about another lady—leastways a woman."

Silas spoke solemnly, and Gregory as he asked:

"What woman?" looked uneasy and anxious.

"Well, sir, there was a woman came to me last night and commenced asking me a lot of questions about a certain gentleman; from the description I knew she was alluding to you."

"Well, well?"

"Well, sir, she waited for you till near three o'clock, but you didn't come."

"I stayed with friends on the other side of the water. Did she tell you what she wanted with me?"

"She said she wanted money."

Silas spoke with great significance.

"You think she wanted more?" Axon asked nervously.

"Yes, sir, much more. As she talked to me, she kept continually putting her hand to her breast. She had got something concealed there."

What? Gregory wondered. Perhaps a dagger. He had known such things.

"She wanted more than money, sir. It's my firm conviction that she wants your life."

Gregory recoiled.

"Do you mean that?" he gasped.

"I do, sir. I've had a good deal of experience with them sort. Partly through always being up at night, and partly

through keeping my eyes open, and if ever any woman meant murder that woman did last night."

Silas was surprised to see the strong effect his words had upon his listener.

Gregory turned ghastly white, and beads of perspiration rose upon his face.

"Ah," the baked-potato merchant reflected "he's a bad 'un at heart, or he wouldn't turn that color. I desay he didn't do the right thing with her in the years gone by. Howsomever, it was my duty to warn him, however bad he may be."

"Describe her to me," Gregory said, and as Silas did so his agitation increased.

"Did she tell you how she found my address out?"

"She said that she recognised you as you was driving home one night in a Hansom cab. It happened that she was acquainted with the driver, and when she met him he described to her the position of the house he had taken you to."

An oath escaped Gregory.

"She is to be on the watch again to-night, you say?"

"Yes. She'll be at my shop about eleven. I told her that you were out every evening."

"Quite right. When you see her to-night don't let her think that you have told me anything. Let her wait and be hanged to her!"

"You won't pass, sir?"

"No, no."

"Don't you think, sir, it would be better if you was to?"

"Why?"

"Well, sir, you could have some one in readiness to seize her arm when she attempted to strike, and then you know, sir, you'd be able to get her bound over, or something of that sort."

Gregory shuddered.

"No, no," he repeated decisively; "it is better for me to avoid her. You have behaved very well in this matter. Here's a sovereign. Keep her airing her heels in the street to-night and induce her to do the same to-morrow night, and there will be another coin of the same value for you."

"I'll see it's done, sir."

"Ain't he in a jolly funk," Silas muttered as he left the house, fingering the sovereign with considerable satisfaction.

Left alone Gregory sank into a chair.

"It's that fiend, Mary Hope," he muttered. "She's a desperate woman, and if she has made up her mind to destroy me, nothing will turn her from her purpose. But I'll get away. I shall have Barr's money in a few days, and then for the Continent. That move will effectually baffle Mary Hope."

When he returned to the room wherein sat Marl and Mr. Barr he looked pale, worn, and anxious.

"Bad news?" asked the first-named.

"No. But I find I shall have to go a little way out of town this evening, I shall not be back all night."

The last part of his speech was directed to Walter Barr, who bowed in silent acquiescence.

A great change had taken place in the appearance of the erstwhile dilapidated Mr. Marl. He wore a new suit of well-cut black. His linen was scrupulously white; a neat, narrow black tie was round his neck, and beneath this a small gold stud might be seen. A pair of gold links were in his cuffs, and a small, thin chain of the same metal nestled in the folds of his waistcoat. Dress, in this case, had certainly made the man. Mr. Marl had now an exceedingly gentlemanly appearance, and, as Gregory had predicted, he would very easily pass as a wealthy capitalist.

Mr. Axon had introduced him to Walter Barr as a "gentleman of wealth and position," and his poor victim had not doubted the description. The truth was the affairs of the world were now of so little interest to Walter that he did not stop to question any of Gregory's assertions. Whether Gregory was deceiving him or was acting straightforwardly, was supremely indifferent to him. The plotter had a most easy victim, and more than once the question arose in Gregory's own mind whether he had not taken unnecessary pains with his plans.

"Howover," he reflected, "it's as well to be on the safe side, and now I've commenced I must go on. It would have been better if I could have kept that fellow Marl out of it; but it's too late now, and what I shall give him won't hurt me."

"You see," said Gregory, resuming the conversation that the arrival of Silas had interrupted, "the scheme is a capital one, and is sure to be remunerative."

"It is impossible for it to fail," declared Marl, in slow, measured accents.

"And if you like to put all your money into it," Gregory went on, "there won't be any occasion to go to the public for support at all. We'll keep it snug and quiet to us three. In a couple of years' time we shall each have a fortune."

"You know," said Walter, in an indifferent tone, "I am quite in your hands, Gregory. If you think well of the scheme, I will go in for it."

"I should like Mr. Barr to be quite satisfied himself before receiving his money," declared the scrupulous Mr. Marl.

Walter waved his hand.

"I am quite satisfied," he said, "as you say the scheme is a good one. I'll do all that is necessary, Gregory; these business discussions weary me."

"I shall want you to sign this," said Gregory, drawing a formidable document from his pocket.

"What is it?"

"Merely your instructions to Mr. Wicks to sell all the stock standing in your name in the Bank of England."

Walter signed it.

"Wicks will sell out, you know," Gregory proceeded, "and then lodge the money to your credit in the bank. If you like to give me the cheque now so that Mr. Marl can draw this money out, I shan't have to trouble you again."

Without hesitation the unhappy man acted upon Gregory's suggestion. With an unconcealed air of triumph Mr. Axon placed the document in his pocket-book. He was now master of every half-penny Mr. Barr possessed.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Efforts made by the National Fish Culture Association, England, to acclimatize the American whitefish have met with most encouraging results. Many of those which had been hatched at South Kensington, after their transference to the ponds at Delaford, thrived remarkably well.

Experiments made under the direction of the administration of the Dutch State railways with various paints on iron plates are reported to have proved that the red lead paints resist atmospheric influence much better than those of brown-red and iron oxides. The red lead paints adhered closer to the metal, and possessed greater elasticity, than the others. It was also found that better results were attained if before the paints were applied the plates were pickled, instead of being merely scraped and brushed. The test plates were pickled in muriatic acid, washed with water, thoroughly dried, and, while warm, carefully oiled.