









CHAPTER XIII. AN ILL PLAN. As Pierre Turrian stood, like one spellbound, reading the slip of paper which Beryl had put into his hand...

Then he reread every word and every of his memory to recall what had passed between them at the time of their first interview...

"How do you say you got this, Miss Leicester?" he asked, looking toward her and speaking with a mien on his lip.

"The question is not how I got it, but what it means," returned Beryl coolly.

"On the contrary, it has everything to do with it. It is the most ordinary coincidence I have ever heard of."

"Is that your answer?" And Beryl looked more stern than before, every feature speaking her disbelief.

"There is nothing to answer in such a thing as this. If you had asked me all I can say is that either those who gave you this have imposed upon you in the most monstrous fashion in the world, or for some purpose which I do not pretend to know you are trying to impose on me."

"You are recovering from your first surprise, and in your effort to find time in which to invent some sort of explanation you make it a kind of implied charge against me that I have been prying into your secrets. I understand you perfectly and have seen through your pretenses from the first. Please to appreciate that fact in whatever you say."

"He looked at her, violently as she spoke, but he was almost frightened at the cold, implacable, ruthless frankness of her gray eyes. He heaved his shoulders and lifted his white hands and smiled till he showed his teeth as he replied in a tone of assumed carelessness."

"You are a delightful antagonist, Miss Leicester, and I like you very much. But tell me, if you have made up your mind beforehand that I have all sorts of pretenses to be seen through and that I am the villain of your looks imply, what is the use of this conversation?"

"I have said nothing about your being a villain, M. Turrian. I have asked you only what that entry in the St. Sulpio book means. That is all."

"And in what connection do you mean the honor to catch me? On whose behalf do you act? In what interest?"

"There is no mistaking the palpable sneer in the question. "There is no necessity to answer that question. You are not compelled to answer what I have said, unless you please."

"On the contrary, Miss Leicester, we are not accustomed to meet with lady knights either who take up the name of men of the world, whom they imagine to have been ill used. It may be quite usual in England, of course, but that is my reason for asking in whose interest you undertake this energetic detective work."

"His last words stung her, but she showed no irritation. "The one question is what that paper means," she said firmly. "There is no other question of any importance."

"Well, that is quite my view. "He had now recovered his customary impudent audacity and was beginning to enjoy the incident. "And in that connection this paper means that a young lady of excellent family, unblemished character, great mental capacity and many personal charms," and he bowed and paused a moment, "who is not married to Sir Jaffray Walcott, much to the regret of that distinguished baronet, more distinguished mother, has been prying into matters which do not concern her at all, except, of course, in so far as they relate to that period of her life when—it will generally be understood she would make that marriage."

"You will do me the honor to answer the question I have asked you in the attempt—a useless one, I assure you—to irritate me by insults into a forgetfulness of it," replied Beryl, seeing that he persisted to notice what effect his words would have upon her.

to drop, to fall, and I set out on my travels in search of her who had deserted me. In the course of time I tracked her to England, and—well, you know the rest."

He stopped and waved his hand as though he had finished, said Beryl. "Go on—the end," said Beryl. "The end! My God, the end is not yet!"

You gave me the news that my wife had done what I hoped she would, and you helped me to find her. I thank you. I found her, saw her, showed her what my power was and how she must do what I wished or be dragged in the dirt of scandal and calumny. Poor Lola! I am sorry for her. She thought my bones were bleaching at the foot of the Devil's rock when they walked into her presence, covered with flesh and clothed in sprightly attire. Poor devil! But a man must live. And he laughed as if he thought of her.

Beryl looked at him with the deepest loathing and could scarce restrain the words of scorn that rose to her lips. He read her looks.

"I see what you would say," he exclaimed, with his usual movement of the shoulders as if to scorn her opinion. "For the moment it is an ugly looking part that I play, but Lola can well spare the little allowance which I require for my few wants, she can live without money. I am no Enoch Arden, and I will not die."

He glanced at her vindictively as she was saying the last words, and he felt that he would give half his life if he could have seen that cold, hard, mercenary face lying dead before him at that instant.

That thought started another and a grimmer one, so grim that involuntarily he glanced about him, as if the mere harboring of it might be dangerous, while his lips felt suddenly so parched that he moistened them with his tongue.

The idea grew on him like the germ of a noxious plague, and instinctively his cunning prompted him to shape his story so as to make Lola appear to be whether any one else knew of this secret.

Now that his eyes had been so rudely opened to the real cleverness of the girl who had thus faced him his wife had been quickened to read her, so as to know how best to deal with her.

For that new plan of his he must have time. "I accept your conditions, Miss Leicester," he said when she finished. "I admit—for now it is useless to deny—that what you have found out is true in every detail."

The suddenness of his change of manner and of the confession startled the girl more than anything that had yet occurred in the whole affair.

"Then what business have you here?" she cried in a voice filled with indignation and anger.

"I will tell you all, everything," he said.

"I caused a moment in everything. He was doubtful even at the last moment whether for his purposes he would like to see the man who had been on Lola, nor did he settle the point until he had begun to speak again.

"You have learned much of the truth," he said, "because you have learned the foundation fact of this most sad and terrible matter. Sir Jaffray Turrian and I are both married, to the woman who is known as his wife, but by law and right she is my wife."

The expression on Beryl's face deepened to one of acute pain. "It is terrible!" she exclaimed, almost under her breath. She had been confident of her own strength, but this plain statement of it by the Frenchman shocked her.

"You do not know all," he said. "I hope I don't intrude, but upon my word I couldn't restrain myself any longer. I've seen you two here in such serious conversation for an hour—positively, Beryl, over an hour, nearly two—and as I was dying to know what it was all about I couldn't resist the temptation to make a noise and come in. My Frenchman, you know so much I can't bear to see you monopolized in this way, and by Beryl, too, of all people. And I'm sure you are one to the other with curiosity in every eyelash."

"Madame, if the interest that you feel were only such as I could care to have, I should feel that I had lived indeed. And he bowed with his exaggerated courtesy, while a mocking smile drew down the corners of his mouth.

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with Lola, to be effected quietly in his absence. Her repugnance at his conduct made her even anxious to let the blow fall as lightly as possible on Lola, who by this time no doubt bitterly repented what she had done, and Beryl's pity for her grew more acute as she dwelt on the man's cruel baseness in trading on her act. Her own high sense of honor and her deep religious feeling accentuated in her thoughts the sense of bitter despair which she imagined must overwhelm Lola at being forced to admit her crime and lose the man she loved so deeply or to go on living in what was in truth a state of shame and sin. Gradually a single resolve cleared itself in her thoughts.

She would make the man go away at once—that very day, indeed—under pain of his returning and to every-thing which she imagined must overwhelm Lola at being forced to admit her crime and lose the man she loved so deeply or to go on living in what was in truth a state of shame and sin. Gradually a single resolve cleared itself in her thoughts.

With this resolve she left her room to the Frenchman, and she felt that she had decided. As she was going down stairs the luncheon gong sounded, and she went to the parlour to see the order of seeing the man whom she knew on his own confession to be a treacherous scoundrel eating and drinking with her while she was betraying every moment that he held in the house the very sight of him increased her, and when he turned and spoke to her and with his consummate audacity rallied her upon her looks and hoped that she would not be so easily troubled, he did not trouble her as she could scarcely remain at the table.

He perceived Turrian's, and with his daring effrontery dropped little hints and innuendoes as if challenging her to speak.

As soon as the lunch was over, however, she followed him and said she must speak to him alone.

He turned willingly and instantly, with his false, mocking, ever ready smile on his face.

"Yes," he answered, raising his eyebrows. "Well, I am sorry for my poor friend, then. It will be a blow to him, and he will feel it. For I shall not go, Miss Leicester, I shall stay as long as possible. But this I will do for you like—I will go tomorrow morning."

"I will give you till 11 o'clock tomorrow," he said, "and not one hour longer."

"It shall be as you will!" he exclaimed, and he turned to go, but he looked back at her and muttered between his teeth: "Twelve o'clock to-morrow. Between now and then there is a night, young lady, and for you a long one, or I am a fool and a coward."

That he returned to the conservatory by himself and smoked thoughtfully for some minutes. Afterward he went out and walked round the house, looking at the garden and the lawn, and the ground of the bedroom windows in the wing where he knew Beryl's room was, and he was pleased with what he saw.

"I will do," he muttered. "And now there must be a word or two with Sir Jaffray's wife. She must take her part in this scene, and I will do it with careful handling. Let me think it out a bit."

He turned into a side path in the grounds and walked for some time plunged in close, concentrated thought.

When he returned to the house, he had his eyes fixed on the door of Lola's room. In the hall he met Mrs. De Witt, who assumed an air of disconcerted trouble.

"What is every body?" she asked. "I am all alone. Won't you take pity on me, M. Turrian?"

"What is Sir Jaffray?" she asked, wishing the woman at the bottom of the sea.

"Sir Jaffray and Lola have gone out riding. Sir Jaffray is a most interesting man to a political or county folk about some meeting or business or other, and he is a very good fellow. They're like a couple of ridiculous lovers in every respect. They must always be together."

"Time will change it," said the Frenchman. "It is not the sort of folly of which you would be guilty, Madame."

"Do you mean that nastily?" "No, indeed. But you know so well how to keep at a cool distance from her admirer, even from her husband. And he bowed. He felt vicious at Lola's absence, and Mrs. De Witt's pertness irritated him.

"I am sure you can do with me," he said in a gentle, coaxing tone, laying a hand on her which she did not shake off, while he looked right into her eyes.

She made a movement then as if to take her hand from his, and quickly he turned to the piano.

"You are cruel," he said without looking at her, and then he bent again into a song in which his whole heart and soul seemed to be caught in a strong, irresistible swirl of emotion. He was like one beside himself till the end came suddenly and quickly, and then, as if obeying an irresistible impulse, he turned so that he could catch her in his quick, lithe embrace, he held her close to him while he kissed her three times passionately right full on the lips.

She half screamed and struggled back, frightened at what she had done, but she was too weak to resist, and yet not wholly displeased at having fired the man. Then she found her voice and cried:

"How are you?" And in a tremulous mingled emotion she fled out of the room.

To be Continued.

What was to be done? Beryl asked herself the question over and over again as she paced up and down her room, and there seemed no resource but to strain and plead sorrow and misery and perhaps disgrace for them all. She hated to think that she had to bring all this trouble on those who were so dear to her, and she dreaded all the exposure and scandal that must follow.

When she had told the man that she had thought of a means of escape from all the trouble, it had been merely that in her almost morbid eagerness to prevent scandal she must have consented to go away at once and leave the future settlement of the difficulty

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