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THE AMERICAN BARON.

(BY JAMES DE MILLE.)

(Continued.)

"Me! I'm the Baron Armatage; and I want Min. Don't you know where she is?"

"Who?"

"Min?"

"Min? asked the other, in amazement."

"Yes. My Min—Minnie, you know, Minnie Fay."

"At this the lady looked at the Baron with utter horror."

"I want her."

"She's not at home, said the lady."

"Well, really, it's too bad. I must see her. Is she out?"

"Yes."

"Really? Honor bright now?"

"The lady retired and shut the door."

"Well, darn it all, you needn't be so peppy, muttered the Baron. I didn't say anything. I only asked a civil question. Out, hey? Well, she must be this time. If she'd been in, she'd have made her appearance. Well, I'd best go out and hunt her up. They don't seem to me altogether so cordial as I'd like to have them. They're just a little too 'ritocratic."

"With these observations to himself, the Baron descended the stairs, and made his way to the door. Here he threw an engaging smile upon the servant, and made a remark which set the other on the broad grin for the remainder of the day. After this the Baron took his departure."

"The Baron this time went to some stable, and reappeared in a short time mounted upon a gallant steed, and careering down the Corso. In due time he reached the Piazza del Popolo, and then he ascended the Pincian Hill. Here he rode about for some time, and finally his presence was rewarded. He was looking down from the summit of the hill upon the Piazza below, when he caught sight of a barouche, in which were three ladies. One of these sat on the front seat, and her white face and short golden hair seemed to indicate to him the one he sought."

"In an instant he put spurs to his horse, and rode down the hill as quick as possible, to the great alarm of the crowds who were going up and down. In a short time he had caught up with the carriage. He was right. It was the right one, and Minnie was there, together with Lady Dalrymple and Mrs. Willoughby. The ladies, on learning of his approach, exhibited no emotion. They were prepared for this, and resigned. They had determined that Minnie should have no more interviews with him indoors; and since they could not imprison her altogether, they would have to submit for the present to his advances. But they were rapidly becoming desperate."

"Lord Hawbury was riding by the carriage as the Baron came up."

"Hallo! said he to the former. How do you and how are you all? Why, I've been hunting all over creation. Well, Minnie, how goes it? Feel lively? That's right. Keep out in the open air. Take all the exercise you can, and eat as hard as you can. You live too quiet as a general thing, and want to knock around more. But we'll fix all that, won't we, Min, before a month of Sundays?"

"The advent of the Baron in this manner, and his familiar address to Minnie, filled Hawbury with amazement. He had been surprised at finding him with the ladies on the previous day, but there was nothing in his demeanor which was at all remarkable. Now, however, he noticed the very great familiarity of his tone and manner toward Minnie, and was naturally amazed. The Baron had not confided to him his secret, and he could not understand the cause of such intimacy between the representatives of such different classes. He therefore listened with inexpressible astonishment to the Baron's language, and to Minnie's artless replies."

"Minnie was sitting on the front seat of the barouche, and was alone in that seat. As the gentlemen rode on each side of the carriage her face was turned toward them. Hawbury rode back, so that he was beside Lady Dalrymple; but the Baron rode forward, on the other side, so as to bring himself as near to Minnie as possible. The Baron was exceedingly happy. His happiness showed itself in the flush of his face, in the glow of his eyes, and in the general exuberance and all-embracing swell of his manner. His voice was loud, his gestures demonstrative, and his remarks were addressed by turns to each one in the company. The others soon gave up the attempt to talk, and left it all to the Baron. Lady Dalrymple and Mrs. Willoughby exchanged glances of despair. Hawbury still looked on in surprise, while Minnie remained perfectly calm, perfectly self-possessed, and conversed with her usual simplicity."

"As the party thus rode on they met a horseman, who threw a glance over all of them. It was Girasole. The ladies bowed, and Mrs. Willoughby wished that he had come a little before, so that he could have taken the place beside the carriage where the Baron now was. But the place was now appropriated, and there was no chance for the Count. Girasole threw a dark look over them, which rested more particularly on Hawbury. Hawbury nodded lightly at the Count, and didn't appear to take any further notice of him. All this took up but a few moments, and the Count passed on."

"Shortly after they met another horseman. He sat erect, pale, sad, with a solemn, earnest glow in his melancholy eyes."

"Minnie's back was turned to him, so that she could not see his face, but his eyes were fixed upon Mrs. Willoughby. She looked back at him and bowed, as did also Lady Dalrymple. He took off his hat, and the carriage rolled past. Then he turned and looked after it, bareheaded and Minnie caught sight of him, and smiled and bowed. And then in a few moments more the crowd swallowed up Some Dacres."

"The Baron thus enjoyed himself in a large, exuberant fashion, and monopolized the conversation in a large exuberant way. He out-did himself. He confided to the ladies his plans for the regeneration of the Roman Church and the Roman State. He told stories of his adventures in the Rocky Mountains. He mentioned the state of his finances, and his prospects for the future. He was as open, as free, and as communicative as if he had been at home, with fond sisters and admiring brothers around him. The ladies were disgusted at it all; and by the ladies I mean only Mrs. Willoughby and Lady Dalrymple. For Minnie was not—she actually listened in delight. It was not conventional. Very well. Neither was the Baron. And for that matter, neither was she. He was a child of nature. So was she. His rudeness, his aggressiveness, his noise, his talkativeness, his egotism, his confidences about himself—all these did not make him so very disagreeable to her as to her sister and aunt."

"So Minnie treated the Baron with the utmost complaisance, and Hawbury was surprised, and Mrs. Willoughby and Lady Dalrymple were disgusted, but the Baron was delighted, and his soul was filled with perfect joy. But the end came, and they reached the hotel. Hawbury left them, but the Baron lingered. The spot was too sweet, the charm too dear—he could not tear himself away."

"In fact he actually followed the ladies into the house."

"I think I'll make myself comfortable in here, Min, till you come down, said the Baron. And with these words he walked into the reception-room, where he selected a place on a sofa, and composed himself to wait patiently for Minnie to come down."

"So he waited, and waited, and waited—but Minnie did not come. At last he grew impatient. He walked out, and up the stairs and listened."

"He heard ladies' voices. He spoke."

"Minnie!"

"No answer."

"Mrs! louder."

"No answer."

"MIX! HALLO-O-O-O!"

"No answer."

"MIN! a perfect shout."

"At this a door was opened violently, and Mrs. Willoughby walked out. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes glared fire."

"Sir, she said, this is intolerable! You must be intoxicated. Go away at once, or I shall certainly have you turned out of the house."

"And saying this she went back, shut the door and locked it."

"In East and West and North and South, We made the nations fear us— Both Nebuchadnezzar and Hannibal, And Pharaoh too, and Pyrrhus."

"We took their statues from the Greeks, And lots of manuscripts too; We set adrift on this world-wide tramp The original wandering Jew."

"But at last the beggarly Dutchman came With his lager and sauerkraut; And wherever that beggarly Dutchman went He made a terrible rout."

"'Who is Deutcher's Faterland? Is it near the ocean wild? Is it where the feathery palm-trees grow? Not there, not there, my child."

"'But it's somewhere down the Rhine; And now that Bismarck's come, Down goes Napoleon to the ground, And away goes the Pope from Rome!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"HE SAVED MY LIFE."

"I can't bear this any longer! exclaimed Mrs. Willoughby. Here you are getting into all sorts of difficulties each one worse than the other. I'm sure I don't see why you should. You're very quiet, Minnie dearest, but you have more unpleasant adventures than any person I ever heard of. You're run away with on horseback, you're shipwrecked, you're swept down a precipice by an avalanche, and you fall into the crater of a burning volcano. Every time there it comes a horrid man who saves you, and then proposes. As for you, you accept them all with equal readiness, one after another, and what is worse, you won't give any of them up. I've asked you explicitly which of them you'll give up, and you actually refuse to say. My dear child, what are you thinking of? You can't have them all. You can't have any of them. None of them are agreeable to your family. They're horrid. What are you going to do? Oh, how I wish you had dear mamma to take care of you! But she is in a better world. And here is a poor dear papa who can't come. How shocked he would be if he knew all. What is worst, here is that dreadful American savage, who is gradually killing me. He certainly will be my death. What am I to do, dear? Can't you possibly show a little sense yourself—only a little, dear—and have some consideration for your poor sister? Even Ethel worries about you though she has troubles of her own, poor darling; and aunt is really quite ill with anxiety. What are we going to do? I know one thing."

"I'm not going to put up with it. My mind is made up. I'll leave Rome at once, and go home and tell papa."

"Well, you needn't scold so, said Minnie. It's my trouble. I can't help it. They would come. I'm sure I don't know what to do."

"Well, you needn't be so awfully kind to them all. That's what encourages them so. It's no use for me to try to keep them away if you make them all so welcome. Now there's that dreadful Italian. I'm positive he's going to get up some unpleasant plot. These Italians are so very revengeful. And he thinks you're so fond of him, and I'm so opposed. And he's right, too. You always act as if you're fond of him, and all the rest of it. And as to that terrible American savage, I'm afraid to think of him; I positively am."

"Why, you needn't be so awfully unkind to him. He saved my life."

"That's no reason why he should deprive me of mine, which he will do if he goes on so much longer."

"You were very, very rude to him, Kitty, said Minnie, severely, and very, very unkind—"

"I intended to be so."

"I really felt like crying, and running out and explaining things."

"I know you did, and ran back and locked the door. Oh, you wretched little silly goose, what am I to do with such a child as you are! You're really not a bit better than a baby."

"This conversation took place on the day following the Baron's last eventual call. Poor Mrs. Willoughby was driven to desperation, and lay awake all night, trying to think of some plan to baffle the enemy, but was unsuccessful; and so she tried once more to have some influence over Minnie by a remonstrance as sharp as she could give."

"He's an American savage, I believe he's an Indian."

"I'm sure I don't see any thing savage in him. He's as gentle and as kind as he can be. And he's so awfully fond of me. Think how he burst in here, forcing his way in, and taking possession of the house. And then poor dear aunt! Oh, how she was shocked and horrified!"

"It's because he is so awfully fond of me, and was so perfectly crazy to see me. And then just as I was beginning to persuade him to go away quietly, to think of you coming down!"

"Well, I couldn't bear to have him so sad, when he saved my life, and so I just thought I'd show myself, so as to put him at ease."

"A pretty way to show yourself—to let a great, horrid man treat you so."

"Well, that's what they all do, said Minnie, plaintively. I'm sure I can't help it."

"Oh, dear, was there ever such a child! Why, Minnie darling, you must know that such things are very, very ill-bred, and very, very indelicate and unrefined. And then, think how he came forcing himself upon us when we were driving. Couldn't he see that he wasn't wanted? No, he's a savage. And then, how he kept giving us all a history of his life. Every body could hear him, and people stared so that it was really quite shocking."

"Oh, that's because he is so very, very frank. He has none of the deceit of society, you know, Kitty darling."

"Deceit of society! I should think not! Only think how he acted yesterday—forcing his way in and rushing up stairs. Why, it's actually quite frightful. He's like a madman. We will have to keep all the doors locked, and send for the police."

"Why, do you know, Ethel says that he was here before, running about and shouting in the same way: 'Min! 'Min! 'Min! that's what the horrid wretch calls you—'Min it's me.' 'Come Min!'"

"At this Minnie burst into a peal of merry, musical laughter and laughed on till the tears came to her eyes. Her sister looked more disgusted than ever."

"He's such a boy, said Minnie; he's just like a boy. He's so awfully funny. If I'm a child, he's a big boy and the awfulest, funniest boy I ever saw. And then he's so fond of me. Why he worships me. Oh, it's awfully nice."

"A boy! A beast, I think you mean—a horrid savage. What can I do? I must send for a policeman. I'll certainly have the doors all locked. And then we'll be prisoners."

"Well then it will be your own fault if I don't want to have any doors locked. Oh, dear, sighed her sister."

"Well, I don't. And I think you're very unkind."

"Why, you silly child, he'd come here some day, carry you off and make you marry him."

"Well, I do wish he would, said Minnie gravely. I wish somebody would, for then it would put a stop to all this worry. I don't know what else ever will. Do you now, Kitty darling?"

"Mrs. Willoughby turned away with a gesture of despair."

"An hour or two after some letters were brought in, one of which was addressed to

Miss Fay

Poste Restante, Rome

"Minnie opened this, and looked over it with a troubled air. Then she spoke to her sister, and they both went off to Minnie's room."

"Who do you think this is from? she asked."

"Oh, I don't know! Of course its some more trouble."

"It's from Captain Kirby."

"Oh, of course! And of course he's here in Rome?"

"No, he isn't."

"What! Not yet?"

"No; but he wrote this from London. He has been to the house and learned that we had gone to Italy. He says he has sent off letters to me directed to every city in Italy, so that I may be sure to get. Isn't that good of him?"

"Well! asked Mrs. Willoughby repressing an exclamation of vexation."

"Well, he says that in three days he will leave and go first to Rome as he thinks we will be most likely to be there this season. And so you see he's coming on, and he will be here in three days you know."

"Minnie, said her sister, after some moments of solemn thought."

"Well, Kitty darling?"

"Do you ever think?"

"I don't know."

"Would you like one of these gentlemen of yours to blow one of the other's brains out, or stab him, or anything of that sort?"

"How shocking you are, Kitty dear! What a dreadful question!"

"Well understand me now. One of them will do that. There will be trouble, and your name will be associated with it."

"Well, said Minnie, I know who won't be shot."

"Who?"

"Why, Rufus K. Gunn, said she, in the funny, prim way in which she always pronounced that name. If he finds it out he'll drive all the others away."

"And would you like that?"

"Well, you know, he's awfully fond of me, and he's so like a boy, and if I'm such a child, I could do better with a man, you know, that's like a boy, you know than—than—"

"Nonsense! He's a madman, and you're a simpleton, you little goose."

"Well, then, must be well suited to one another, said Minnie."

"Now, child, listen, said Mrs. Willoughby, firmly. I intend to put a stop to this. I have made up my mind positively to leave Rome, and take you home to papa. I'll tell him all about it, put you under his care, and have no more responsibility with you. I think he'd better send you back to school. I've been too gentle. You need a firm hand. I'll be firm for a few days, till you can go to papa. You need not begin to cry. It's for your own good. If you're indulged any more, you'll simply go to ruin."

"Mrs. Willoughby's tone was different from usual, and Minnie was impressed by it. She saw that her sister was resolved. So she stole up to her and twined her arms about her and kissed her."

"There, there, said her sister, kissing her again, don't look so sad, Minnie darling. It's for your own good. We must go away, or else you'll have another of those dreadful people. You must trust to me now, dearest, and not interfere with me in any way."

"Well, well, you mustn't be unkind to poor Rufus K. Gunn, said Minnie."

"Unkind? Why, we won't be anything to him at all."

"And am I never to—see him again?"

"No! said her sister, firmly."

"Minnie started, and looked at Mrs. Willoughby and saw in her face a fixed resolve."

"No never! repeated Mrs. Willoughby. I am going to take you back to England. I'm afraid to take any railroad or steamboat. I'll hire a carriage, and we'll all go in a quiet way to Florence. Then we can take the railroad to Leghorn, and go home by the way of Marseilles. No one will know that we've gone away. They'll think we have gone on an excursion. Now we'll go out driving this morning, and this afternoon we must keep the outer door locked, and not let any one in. I suppose there is no danger of meeting him in the morning, he must be on duty then."

"But mayn't I see him at all before we go?"

"No! Just once—only once?"

"No, not once. You've seen that horrid man for the last time."

"Minnie again looked at her sister, and again read her resolution in her face."

"She turned away, her head drooped, a sob escaped from her, and then she burst into tears."

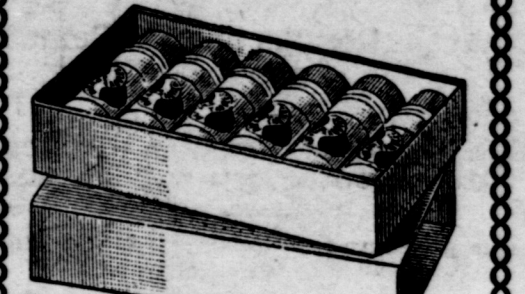
Mrs. Willoughby left the room.

To be Continued.

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