

# THE RECTOR'S SECRET.

OR

## LOVE CONQUERS ALL.

A STUDY FROM LIFE.

BY J. R. ABARBANELL.

## CHAPTER XVIII.—Continued.

"My lady, I—I cannot speak," stammered Harold. "When the heart is full—"

He relieved his emotion by embracing his bride; then he hugged Walter; and finally imprinted a filial kiss on the countess' lips.

Together it was a scene of pure, unalloyed bliss, the real depth of which was known to Lady Buford and Walter alone.

There were so many things to talk about, so many little incidents to relate, so many plans for the future to lay out, that the entire day and a good portion of the evening were spent in Buford House by our young friends.

It was late at night when Harold finally tore himself away from his betrothed, and Walter bade his mother a dear good-night.

It was arranged that they should see each other every day. As to Walter's return to America, and Harold's marriage to Ethel, those were subjects left for future consideration.

At least so it was settled when the young men left Buford House. When, however, they reached their hotel, Walter found awaiting him a cable despatch from his foster father which entirely upset all these plans.

The despatch read as follows:

Return at once. Your presence alone can save Blanche from suicide.

## CHAPTER XIX.

THE ACCIDENT.

Frank Barton had accomplished his purpose. Blanche had consented to marry the millionaire of his choice, and he had an unlimited bank account on which he could freely draw. Still he was far from being happy.

There was something in Blanche's very consent which alarmed him. It was given so readily, almost unasked for, with so much of a strange, fixed determination that he began to wonder whether her brain had not suddenly become affected; whether she was not regarding the marriage as a measure to gain possession of the supposed forged check, and thus free him from all fear of criminal prosecution; and that, having done that, she would seek oblivion of her sorrows in a suicide's grave.

There was a good deal in the absence of all emotion which she now showed, the perfunctory way in which she went through her duties, the cold, freezing manner in which she received her betrothed—a certain air of a victim being led to the sacrifice—which strengthened this impression.

He determined to keep a close watch on her actions, and as a matter of precaution removed his revolvers out of the house.

Many a time he was tempted to speak to her, to even reveal the miserable deception he was practicing on her; but she would not allow him the opportunity of doing so.

She never addressed him except when it was absolutely necessary; and she stopped all attempts at conversation on his part by a cold, rigid stare. Though they continued to live under the same roof she steadily ignored his presence.

Frank felt that he had forfeited his sister's esteem, and it cut him to the quick, the more so as he was sure that she loved him still; that beneath her icy exterior her sister heart beat as warmly as ever for him. Her contempt made him feel very small, indeed, and he became both reckless and despondent.

Thus matters went on for a few weeks, and there was no change in the condition of affairs, except that the marriage of Blanche to Harvey Van Rensselaer was fixed to take place within four weeks.

About two weeks before that event was to take place, Frank, returning from the broker's office, was overtaken by a sudden thunder shower. He had an umbrella with him and did not much mind the rain. As he passed a corner, however, he noticed a young girl standing under the shelter of an awning, and looking helplessly at the downpour. She was clad in a light, fleecy, summer dress, and had only a small silk parasol in her hands, which was entirely inadequate to the occasion.

With the ordinary gallantry of a young man about-town, Frank approached her and said:

"Excuse me, miss, but if you will accept the shelter of my umbrella, I shall be happy to escort you home."

"I shall be much obliged to you if you would," replied the girl, innocently enough. "The sun shone so clear, and the sky was so blue when I left the house, that I did not think of taking an umbrella with me."

Without the slightest fear, and with perfect confidence in him as a gentleman, she accepted his arm and mentioned the street and number where she lived.

Her naive and utter absence of all affectation sealed Frank's lips to the utterance of any of the common-places he might otherwise have indulged in. He contented himself with a discreet admiration of her lithe, fairy-like form and lovely face, and wondered who she was, without daring to ask her name. She, on her part, showed no inclination to volunteer any information on the subject, and evinced no curiosity to learn her escort's name. They spoke about the weather until they arrived at the address she had given, and then, with a smile and a "thank you," she disappeared in the house.

Frank experienced a sensation as if a ray of sunshine had suddenly been thrown across his path and as suddenly vanished. It was a new and rather uncomfortable sensation for the young man-about-town in search of an orphan heiress for a wife.

"Who is she anyway?" he somewhat fretfully muttered. "After my impudence in addressing her and offering myself to her as an escort, her ready acceptance knocked all the bravado out of me I've never felt so much like a booby in all my life. Not even did I dare ask her name or to offer her my card! It's perfectly ridiculous."

Just then he caught sight of the silver plate on the front door. He uttered a prolonged whistle.

"Horace Wainwright, I declare! The rector! I'll wager anything that she's his daughter. Yes, I remember now. Her name is Mabel. Walter mentioned it one evening to Blanche, and stated he would like to introduce her to her. This is tough."

It was tougher yet when he got home that night, and dreamed of a pair of blue eyes looking reproachfully at him, and a tapering finger pointing out across the ocean, whither he had exiled her foster brother. It was tougher yet when, on awakening in the morning, he had to acknowledge to himself that he had fallen in love.

It was a very serious thing for him to be in love. Not that he had not experienced the tender passion before. Since the time he first became a young man-about-town he had had any number of love affairs with fair daughters of Eve, from the reigning theatrical star down to the pretty house-maid next door. But these tender passions were strictly confined to the interchange of a billet doux or two, the escort to and from a place of amusement, a squeeze of the waist, or a surreptitious kiss. He had calculated, very carefully calculated, that he was going to love, that is love in downright, real earnestness, only a young girl unencumbered with parents or relatives, and possessor in her own right of at least one hundred thousand dollars.

But cupid not only laughs at locksmiths, but often plays sad havoc with the best laid plans.

Frank had not thought Walter Wainwright rich enough to become Blanche's husband, and now he himself was in love with Mabel, who, undoubtedly, had less of this world's goods than her foster brother. He had separated Walter from Blanche by means of a miserable falsehood. How could he hope to win Mabel's love without confessing his fault; how could he hope to win her hand without bringing Walter back to Blanche? And his sister was to become another's wife within two weeks, under duress of an implied threat of arrest for forgery hanging over his head.

Frank groaned aloud as he mentally reviewed all the wretched complications in which he had involved himself and everybody else around him. He saw no way out of his tribulations; and, with a deep sigh, he came to the determination to banish all thought of Mabel, and to exorcise her image from his heart.

But this was easier determined upon than accomplished. He found himself thinking of Mabel all the time; and he could, at any moment, conjure up her picture as she breathed and lived.

He became nervous and excited, and threw out dark hints, which made his sister, who could not comprehend what ailed him, as apprehensive that he would commit suicide as he was that she would destroy her life.

What an unhappy pair they were, to be sure, with the day of Blanche's self-sacrifice on the altar of mammon drawing nearer with every rising and setting of the sun.

With all that, and all that, Frank's footsteps would irresistibly lead him to the rectory; and for hours of an evening he would stand on the sidewalk opposite the house, waiting for her silhouette to be outlined on the white window shades.

Sometimes he caught a glimpse of her in the crowded street. Then he would shrink away to prevent her from seeing him, and, at a respectful distance, he would follow her until she disappeared in the rectory.

He never sought to address her, to renew the chance acquaintance he had made.

"Of what use would it be," he reasoned "She can never, will never become my wife."

If Walter had known of Frank's agency in blighting his dearest hopes, and had wanted to revenge himself on him, he could not have inflicted a more severe punishment than that which the plotter was now undergoing.

Thus matters stood, when one day in the afternoon Frank saw Mabel making the attempt at crossing Broadway. There had been a jam the moment previous, and the vehicles, relieved from their temporary stoppage were dashing by, to make up for lost time. As she reached the center of the roadway, a stage came rushing at her at a furious rate. The driver halloed to her to get out of the way. Bewildered and confused she sprang back, only to encounter a heavy express wagon coming in an opposite direction.

The girl uttered a shriek. The pedestrians expected to see her thrown to the ground and run over. One person only rushed to her rescue. It was Frank.

Dashing up to her he gave her a push out of harm's way. In doing so he himself slipped and fell; and a cry of horror escaped from the spectators as they beheld the heavy express wagon roll over him.

## CHAPTER XX.

THE GOLDEN RULE.

"There is a compound fracture of the arm. It is serious, but not necessarily fatal. The greatest danger to be apprehended will be from the internal injuries which he may have sustained."

"Use all your skill, with the aid of Heaven, doctor, to save his life, for he has rescued my daughter."

Frank Barton heard these words in a vague dreamy manner. He was barely conscious that he was lying in bed in a large pleasant room, and that two elderly men were bending over him, when he dropped off into insensibility again.

There was only one man in the room when he once more opened his eyes, and him Frank easily recognized to be Rector Wainwright. Had the doctor just left? He did not know. He had an idea that the sun was shining before, and now the gaslight, which was turned down low, sent a gentle radiance through the room. It was evening, but whether the evening of the same day, or a week later, he could not tell.

How came the good rector to be sitting there beside him? Had his sister called him? This was not his room; the objects in it were unfamiliar to him. He moved slightly, and the motion caused a sharp twinge of pain to shoot through his right arm. It drew his attention to the fact that his arm was encased in plaster-of-paris, which had become hardened and looked like marble.

The pain forced a cry from his lips. At the sound the good rector started up from the doze into which he had fallen and bent anxiously over him.

"Can I be of any service to you, Mr. Barton?" he asked.

"A glass of water, if you please; I feel hot and feverish."

The rector brought him the water and placed the glass to his lips. Frank eagerly drank it and felt greatly relieved.

"Thank you," he said.

"You mustn't speak, Mr. Barton," said the rector, with a kindly smile, as he placed the glass on the small table beside him. "The doctor has strictly forbidden it."

A sigh escaped the young man's lips.

"I know," continued the rector, "that you are eager to question me, and I will tell you all that you want to know. But you must promise me not to excite yourself. Now, don't speak. Only nod your head. That will be sufficient."

A glad light shot into the sufferer's eyes—as he nodded his head.

"First and foremost, you will be pleased to learn that your heroism was not in vain. Mabel, my daughter, thanks to your bravery, escaped unhurt, and is praying to Heaven night and day to spare your life. That you are alive at all is a great miracle; and I am overjoyed to be able to tell you that the doctor finds you have sustained no internal injuries. The front wheel of the express wagon only passed over your person, and thus over your right arm. It is badly fractured, to be sure, but you see the doctor does not think an amputation necessary; and we will hope that it will so heal as not to seriously cripple it. It is three days now since it was set, and it is a good sign that no inflammation has as yet intervened."

"Three days," murmured Frank.

"Ah, you are breaking your promise," chidingly said the rector. "You mustn't speak. Yes, it is three days since the ambulance brought you here. It is wonderful what presence of mind Mabel, usually so timid and fearsome, developed on the sad occasion. When the people carried you, so maimed and helpless, into the drug-store, it was she who telegraphed for an ambulance. When it came, they wanted to take you to the hospital. She would not permit it, nor would she allow you to be taken home. She declared that she knew you, that you had shown her an act of courtesy on a previous occasion, that you had been injured in her behalf, and that you were to be brought to the

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rectory here, where she herself could nurse you."

"She knew me, she—"

"Speaking again," interrupted the rector with a smile. "Of course, she did not know you by name, but we learned it from a card in your card-case. The knowledge gave us an additional right to tend to you. You are the brother of an estimable young lady who is—I mean was—very dear to—to my son."

The worthy clergyman's voice faltered, and he turned his head aside for a moment. A pang, sharper than any which his wounded arm gave him, shot through Frank's heart.

"Your sister has been here with—with her betrothed," continued the rector. "She comes every day, she will be here again to-morrow. She is very grateful for our attention to you, though they are no more than common humanity would demand. I believe now that I have told you all, with the exception that the reporters have got hold of the affair; and your name is blazoned in all the papers, and justly so, as a hero."

A tear started in Frank's eye and coursed slowly down his cheek. He a hero! He the man who, for his own selfish purposes had sundered two loving hearts, had placed his own sister in a terribly false position, had brought separation and sorrow into the house whose roof was now sheltering him, whose inmates were requiting the evil he had done with good—the father watching at his bedside with paternal solicitude, the daughter praying for his recovery. He a hero! Surely they were unconsciously heaping coals of fire on his head. No wonder that he wept.

The rector saw his tears.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## Street Incident.

"My Dear Sir," exclaimed Lawyer Bartholomew Livingston, meeting the Rev. Dr. Archibald Windham on the village street, "What does this mean? I thought you were laid up with all sorts of bad diseases!"

"And so I was," replied the reverend gentleman, "I had an attack of indigestion and from that time on my whole system has been in a disordered condition until I began taking Hood's Sarsaparilla which has put me on my feet and cured all my stomach troubles."

"I don't doubt it," said the lawyer. "This same medicine cured my wife of rheumatism and my little girl of scrofula. When they say it's the best medicine money can buy, they only tell the truth."

"Yes, yes, so they do," replied the minister, and the two passed on.

## A COMING POLITICIAN.

"Charlie, dear, said young Mrs. Torkins, "the baby is trying to talk again. It is wonderful how he takes after you!"

"What is he talking about?"

"I think it must have been politics. He started very calmly, but in a few minutes he was as angry and red in the face as he could be."

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