

THE RECTOR'S SECRET.

OR

LOVE CONQUERS ALL.

A STUDY FROM LIFE.

BY J. R. ABARBANELL.

CHAPTER XI.—Continued.

"You know it?" she asked, while a vivid blush suffused her cheek.

"He's a particular friend of mine, too. Confided all to me. He'll be here to-night. Miss De Vere, allow me to congratulate you."

"Congratulate me on what?"

"Why, your engagement to the Marquis De Montjoie, which is to take place this evening."

"My engagement to the marquis!" she cried, springing to her feet. "Surely there must be some mistake; you have been misinformed."

"Why deny it, my dear lady. It's all over Paris."

"All over Paris!"

"The papers are full of it."

Ethel's face was crimson, but this time not with blushes. It was the fire of indignation which burned in her cheeks and flashed from her eyes.

"Excuse me, my lord," she exclaimed, "this marquis—you cannot understand how he has pestered me with his addresses. I have not complained to my mother about it, because his ambition seemed to me to be perfectly ridiculous. He was polite to mamma, and she, in the goodness of her heart, made him her friend. That is all there is between us. If, on that slender basis, he has caused the rumors you spoke of to circulate, it is perfectly scandalous. My mother shall know of it at once, and, I dare say, will show him to the door if he dares to come here to-night. Please escort me to the parlor."

All this was like honey to Harold's soul. In a perfect tremor of delight he offered his arm to Ethel, and led her back to the parlor.

"Pway, may I inquire the name of your friend in Paris, if it is not the marquis?" he whispered, as they walked along.

"I do not believe you know him. He does not belong to your set. He is an American, an artist. I will show you my portrait, which he painted."

Had they not been on the threshold of the drawing room, Harold would then and there have made a declaration of his love. As they entered the room at one door, the usher threw open another, and pompously announced:

"The Marquis de Montjoie!"

CHAPTER XII.

UNDER FALSE COLORS.

"Ten thousand pardons, milady," exclaimed the marquis, in his choicest French, as he raised the countess' hand to his lips. "Ten thousand pardons for my late arrival. Milady's invitation, with which she was so kind as to honor me, reached me in my country seat, to which I had retired to perform some pious offices in memory of my sainted parents."

The rascal had all along worked the religious dodge for all it was worth. "I hurried to Paris, threw myself into a dress suit, crossed the channel and here I am straight from the depot. Ah, milady, I am so devoted to you, I should be in despair if you do not forgive me."

"I see nothing to forgive, marquis, replied the countess, smiling at what she considered to be his French extravagances of phrase. "You are welcome at all times."

"Ah, milady, you transport me with happiness. And mademoiselle will bid me welcome too, I hope," he added, turning suddenly to Ethel.

Now, Miss Ethel, in spite of her aristocratic breeding, was very apt to spurge right out, like ordinary, common folks, and to say just what she meant.

"Monsieur the marquis is not at all welcome to me," she decidedly declared.

Sensation among the guests who understood French; stupid staring on the part of those who did not.

The rebuff was so direct that, for a moment, the marquis was fairly staggered. He recovered himself, however, and with his usual impudence replied:

"Mademoiselle honors me too highly by quarreling with me—for my want of punctuality."

"It is not that, monsieur," she some what excitedly interrupted. "Do not flatter yourself that I care for either you or your company. But when a person takes liberties with my name—"

"Liberties with your name, my dear," inquired her mother.

"I am blazoned in all the papers of Paris," continued the young girl, "as being about to be engaged in marriage to this man. It is a matter of public notoriety. Very well then, my action shall be equally public. If this person aspires to my hand, in the presence of this assemblage, I reject him."

The adventurer fairly wilted under her scorn and indignation. He saw that he had committed a very imprudent step. He had not intended that Ethel should see or hear of it. He wished to use the weapon only as a last resort, and

then but to influence the countess. Many a French mother has been induced to persuade her daughter into an unwilling union by similar means, but the schemer forgot that he was dealing with an English mother and daughter, who were not quite so much afraid of a public scandal. There was nothing for him to do but to extricate himself from the dilemma with as good grace as possible.

"Ah, mademoiselle," he exclaimed turning up the whites of his eyes, and uttering a profound sigh. "Now that I know to what you allude, I am, indeed, in despair. The happiest hours of my existence were those which I spent in milady's and your company. We were much together in Paris. If some imprudent friend of mine, or, perhaps, some malicious enemy, has drawn unwarranted conclusions from that fact and had them published, am I to blame? I will not deny that I have an ardent affection for you, that to become your husband would render me the happiest of human beings, but I am incapable of stooping to gain my heart's dearest desire by any unworthy means."

"Well, I swan," cried Harold, breaking out in good Yankee English. "For cool, downright cheek that beats the deck."

These Americanisms must have grated harshly on the countess' British ears, for she cast a keen glance at the supposed Scotch lord and shuddered visibly. Ethel, too, seemed somewhat disturbed by the fact that his lordship had forgotten his drawl and lisp, and there was that in the sound of his voice which caused a strange flutter in her heart.

"Permit me, monsieur," said Walter, stepping forward, "to show you these papers. They contain the manuscript copy of the notices about which the young lady complains. Now, it is easy for monsieur to prove that he did not write them. All he has to do is to write a few words and show that the handwriting is dissimilar."

The adventurer saw that he was entrapped. For the first time he became aware of the counterplot which had been quietly hatched to offset his own scheme.

"I do not know you, sir," he blurted; "nor by what right you interrogate me. I know nothing of the papers you hold in your hand, and shall not write to please you or anybody else."

"Very well," replied Walter, dropping into English, "my lords and ladies will please take notice that the gentleman refuses to write. I have, however, a specimen of his handwriting here. It is on the back of one of his own visiting cards, and was written by him in my presence. The handwriting is the same as on this printer's copy. The inference is obvious. I need say no more."

"Milady," cried the baffled marquis fairly foaming with rage, "I appeal to you for protection. These men, whoever they are, have gained admission under your roof by false pretenses."

New sensation and more stupid staring among the guests. "My Lords Dinwiddie and Maxwell here under false pretenses," exclaimed the countess, in surprise.

"I recognize them, now, milady," continued the adventurer. "They are sailing under false colors; they are not lords, they are—"

"No matter who we are," hastily interrupted Walter, fearing the result on Ethel of a too sudden disclosure of their identity. "If we are not lords, if we do not belong to the English nobility, we are not the only ones here to-right under false colors, claiming a title which does not belong to them, a nobility to which they have no right."

The marquis gave a start, and cast an uneasy glance at the door.

Strange! The footmen and outriders who had lent such ostentation to Walter and Harold's arrival, were posted at the exits, completely blocking them up.

"We are Americans, my lady—"

The countess gave a shudder of holy terror. How she did hate the Yankees!

"I speak English, so that all may understand," continued Walter. "This fellow, I believe, pretends he does not, but you will see, before I get through, how well he comprehends me. I repeat we are Americans, (again that shudder), and knowing my lady's abhorrence—pardon the word—of our nation, we were obliged to assume our titles to gain admission here, where we had a stern duty to perform. That duty was to save your daughter, my lady, from the machinations of a cheat, a swindler, a rogue, a refugee from a New York prison, who continues his nefarious designs on this side of the Atlantic, under the guise of a French nobleman—"

"It is a lie, all a lie," cried the adventurer, in the purest of English.

"You see, my lady, coolly continued Walter, "he not only understands English but can speak it as well as I."

The schemer was ready to bite off his tongue with vexation, for having betrayed himself.

Walter hurriedly gave a history of the scoundrel's past career, and then said:

"In the name, and in behalf of the American government, I order the arrest of this criminal Aloys Dubois, alias the Marquis de Montjoie."

"So you'll arrest me, will you?" cried Dubois drawing a revolver from his pocket. "I would like to see you attempt it."

He cocked the weapon, the ladies screamed, there was a moment's confusion, and then monsieur the marquis found himself disarmed and handcuffed, while the footmen and outriders were standing around him in a suspiciously professional way.

"You see," laughed Walter, "here are some more gentlemen sailing under false colors. They are Scotland Yard detectives, who kindly consented to act as our attendants for this occasion only."

The defeated adventurer was led away, howling and swearing, and then everyone was profuse in his thanks to the young heroes.

"You are Harold," whispered Ethel to him, her face radiant with blushes.

"Ah, do not betray me. Your mother hates us Americans."

"But I love you."

The artist was in the seventh heaven of bliss.

"How can I repay the service you have rendered me?" gratefully murmured the countess to our hero.

"By telling me the reason, my lady," he gravely replied, "why your ladyship hates us Americans?"

CHAPTER XIII.

HARVEY VAN RENSSELAER.

Before we can satisfy the reader's pardonable curiosity as to why Lady Buford hated Americans, we must take a hasty trip back to New York City to see what our friends on this side of the Atlantic have been doing.

It was all very well for Frank Barton to break up the love affair between his sister and Walter Wainwright, but unless he could provide a millionaire brother-in-law his whole scheme would be a miserable failure.

To find a young millionaire who would be acceptable to Blanche, who would straightway fall in love with her, and would permit himself to be used by the easy-going young-man-about-town as an unlimited bank account, was an undertaking which might well appear impossible.

Yet Frank flattered himself that he had discovered such a paragon in the person of Harvey Van Rensselaer, a young stock broker.

The scion of the famous Knickerbocker family had inherited the usual untold fortune which falls to the lot of the happy mortals whose ancestors tilled the ground whereon the Empire City now rears its lofty spires. He had also developed on his rather broad Dutch face, the ordinary plentiful crop of pimples which seems to be one of the heir-looks of the set which arrogate to themselves the title of "our best society."

A good liver, at thirty years, his present age, he was already inclined to undue stoutness, which gave his short legs a waddling, ridiculous gait. He was very light in complexion, his eyes a kind of watery blue, he had scarcely any eyebrows at all, his hair was of a dead sandy hue, closely cropped in the back, and duly parted in the middle and "banged" in front.

That he wore the most execrably tight fits of the latest approved London fashion; that his language and metaphors were a mingled jargon of Wall street and the stable; that in everything he did or said he ape'd, or attempted to ape, the vilest manners of an English cockney—all that, as the French say, goes without saying. Else he would not be a perambulating statue on the avenue, or adorn the front window of one of our blue-blood clubs.

Our readers will easily come to the conclusion that Harvey Van Rensselaer was not a handsome man, though he regarded himself as being perfectly irresistible, as far as the fair sex was concerned. His general intelligence was about on a par with his good looks. Otherwise Frank Barton would never have fixed upon him as his prospective brother-in-law. He had that low cunning, which passes for smartness in the ordinary transactions between "Bulls" and "Bears," and was, therefore a successful broker. He also prided himself on knowing a horse when he saw one, and could give you the "points," as he termed it, of half the belles of Gotham, but in everything above and beyond this, in matters of intrigue or requiring the least depth of thought, he was purely and simply a fool.

This was the husband whom Frank, in his intense selfishness, had selected for his sister. The next question was, how was he to bring the two together, how to smooth the way to a proposal?

Some time previous, the Public School Teachers' Association, of which Blanche was a member, had determined to give a select entertainment at Chickering Hall, to be followed by an informal reception of the teachers and their more intimate friends. In her happier hours, Blanche, after some coaxing, had consented to take part in the performance, to the extent of a song and possible encore. She was practicing for the occasion, when all the

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hope and joy were so suddenly taken out of her heart by the discovery of what she supposed to be her lover's infamy. To continue her daily routine of work, to hear dull, dry lessons, to keep a class of unruly boys in order, while her mind was filled with thoughts of the absent one, whom, though disdained, she could not help loving still, and her heart was throbbing with an aching pain. All this she submitted to at the dictate of duty. But to appear in public, with a smiling face, to sing the gladsome happy songs printed on the programme, while the heart of the minstrel is breaking—she feared she could never go through this ordeal.

And yet how could she draw back now, when the affair was to take place in a few days, and everything was prepared? How could she draw back under any circumstances without betraying the sad secret which was gnawing at her very vitals, and which she would have died rather than have anyone suspect?

Her brother, who had determined on this very entertainment to introduce Harry Van Rensselaer to her, of course appealed to her pride, the necessity of showing that she was not entirely crushed by her disappointment; and he finally succeeded, as he generally did, in making her view the matter in the light in which he wished her to.

His influence over his sister was all-powerful, based as it was on her all-absorbing sisterly devotion. That he misused and abused this influence and devotion did not detract from their angelic quality. It only showed how unworthy he was of having such a sister. Proud and unyielding to all, even to her lover, as we have seen, to Frank she was meekness and submissiveness personified.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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The Ottawa Board of Trade has appointed a committee to confer with the City Council to investigate the extent to which the lumber piles were responsible for the fire.

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