

# THE RECTOR'S SECRET.

## OR LOVE CONQUERS ALL.

A STUDY FROM LIFE. BY J. R. ABARBANELL.

### CHAPTER II.—Continued.

"I attended the convention," continued the rector, when he was again alone with Walter, "and after my duties there were over, I visited the various benevolent institutions of the city in search of a child who would be likely to please my wife. I found the matter quite a difficult one as in the most cases where I was willing to adopt the child, there were parents or guardians in the way who opposed a complete surrender. There was only one institution in New York where I would be likely not to find any obstacles in that respect. That was the founding asylum, situated in the vicinity of Abington square, then about five years in operation, and since absorbed in the New York Foundling Asylum. This had been especially opened for unhappy and unfortunate mothers."

"Who were ashamed of their offsprings," interrupted Walter, through his set teeth. "Visit not the sins of the parents on their innocent offsprings," returned the rector. "To me the children were holy, no matter what had been the fault of those to whom they owed their birth. It was like walking in a garden of lilies when the matron showed me through the building and presented her young charges to me."

He paused and looked affectionately at Walter.

"A little black-eyed, curly-headed fellow," he then said, attracted my attention above all the rest. He was about five years old, as near as I could guess, and his winning smile, the bright, intelligent expression of his face and his cunning ways, caused my heart to go out to him at once. I would have him and no other. I learned from the matron that he had been found in the crèche one stormy December night when he was an infant of barely two weeks old, that there was not the slightest clue to his identity on his person or clothing, and no one had ever come to claim him. Need I add that the child was baby clothes you wore when you were found; here is the key."

He drew the key from his pocket and handed it to Walter. The young man, not without some emotion, unlocked and opened the satchel. He took out the diminutive attire and examined it closely. It was plain white; nothing to distinguish it from hundreds of similar ones. Attached to the dress was a ticket, stating the exact day and hour and the circumstances under which he had been received in the asylum.

With an impulse of reverence, he raised the garments to his lips.

"My mother sewed these," he murmured. "They are sacred to me."

"Let your mother, too, be sacred to you in your thoughts," said the rector, earnestly. "She may have been, she very likely was, the victim of a villain's wiles. Whether she be on earth or in heaven, ever think of her as pure and as holy as an angel."

"I have no bitter thoughts against her," replied Walter. "It is only my father whom I already hate and will hate forever."

"Nay, Walter, as a clergyman I cannot listen to such uncharitable expressions. Suspend your judgment on him. There may be circumstances which may plead even for his pardon."

"Never!"

"Never is a very long time," said the kind-hearted clergyman, with a smile, "we shall see. Now that you know all—at least all that I do—it is your duty to acquaint Miss Barton with these facts."

"And if she spurns me?"

"Then she does not deserve to be your wife. She may perhaps, and rightly, too, ask you to make some effort to discover your parentage before the marriage takes place."

"She need not ask it. Now that you have told me this much, I will not rest night or day until I have solved the mystery of my birth."

### CHAPTER III.

BLANCHE BARTON.

Blanche Barton was a teacher in Grammar School No.—. Her pupils—she taught a class of boys—were all dead in love with her, and worked at their lessons with all their might and main in order to win an encouraging smile, or an approving word from her. She, therefore, had the best class in school; the principal praised the uniform good order and discipline which reigned in her room; the superintendent was pleased with the progress which her scholars showed in their examinations; the ward trustees were proud of her ability, and the city rewarded her services with a salary of a thousand dollars a year.

At the Normal College, from which she had graduated with the highest honors, she had won the hearts of most of her

class-mates by her affable ways and gentle manners. A few there were who were envious of her intellectual powers and the promise of beauty which her budding loveliness foretold. As they could not gain-say either the one or the other, they maliciously whispered that she "put on airs," that she was far too proud for a girl who came to college every day in a calico dress, who was only an orphan anyway, without a penny of money left her by her dead parents, and who was being supported by her brother, who, at that time, was a clerk in a broker's office in Wall street.

What would these envious busybodies have said had they known that Frank Barton's meager salary was insufficient for his and his sister's support, and that, after Blanche had finished her lessons for the next day, she would sit long into the night trimming hats for a wholesale millinery house down town?

Yes, she was proud, and though she worked thus night after night, and delivered the fruit of her toil on Saturdays, receiving the money for her labor with a glad heart, she did it all secretly, as if she were committing some great crime, instead of performing a service which made her a shining example of glorious womanhood.

It was the proud sensitiveness of the refined poor, and she carried it with her, on leaving college, into her professional life. Her devotion to duty and certain lucky circumstances assisted her promotion from the lower grades up, and from the primary into the grammar department, with more rapidity than usually falls to the lot of young teachers; and we find her now, at twenty, instructing the highest class open to lady teachers in a boys' school. In this class, for reasons which need not be alluded to here, lady teachers are apt to become fixtures, passing their youth in the dull routine of their duty until they sink into a snappish, hopeless state of old maidism. Was this to be Blanche's fate?

We have said that she was twenty years of age, and the bright promise of her girlhood days had been fully realized in her beautiful womanhood. Tall and graceful in build, with a fairy-like waist; a bust which Juno might have envied, a complexion of dazzling white, large brown eyes, in repose seemingly floating in a sea of liquid tenderness, but capable of expressing the whole gamut of the passions when aroused, a nose slightly retroussé, cherry lips, parting in a smile, and thereby disclosing two rows of glistening pearls, which it were blasphemy to call teeth; two tiny pink ears—all these individual charms, surmounted by a wealth of chestnut-brown locks, which fell in rippling crimps down her low, broad forehead and extended in wavy masses along her neck and shoulders, made of Blanche Barton a picture for an artist to study and a man to love.

It needed but the touch of the divine passion to make the heart throbb tumultuously, to send the blood rushing through the veins, to divest her of that slight air of frigidity which hovers around a "school marm," in order to make her just perfect. And Blanche had her romance.

Even while yet at college she had become a member of the choir of Dr. Wainwright's church. Her parents had worshipped there even before the rector had received the call to its ministry; and when their wealth had been swept away by a financial crisis, and they had died in the shock, leaving their children penniless, Blanche, at least, if not her brother Frank, continued to serve God in the church she had attended since a child. Her sweet, pure voice rising above that of the congregation in the service of song attracted the attention of the organist and, at his solicitation, she joined the choir. On one point she was obdurate, and that was to refuse all offer of payment made to her in common with the other members of the choir. Though she needed the money badly, at the time, and was working her eyes out on the hats she was trimming, she could not understand how anyone could accept payment for worshipping their Creator. She reasoned that He had given her her beautiful soprano voice, and it was but the simplest act of gratitude to raise it in His praise.

Thus every Sunday she stood up in the choir, and the congregation listened entranced to the swelling notes which poured forth from her throat and filled the sacred edifice with a flood of divine melody.

It was her singing which drew Walter Wainwright—we cannot help calling him so—nearer to God. What all of his "foster father's" eloquence might not have effected, the sweet singer accomplished by the use of the gift God had given her. The young lawyer became a constant attendant during the hours of worship and, it may be pardoned him if, when he raised his eyes toward heaven, his gaze should linger on the pure, innocent, beautiful face in the choir loft.

An introduction between the young school teacher and the rector's reputed

son was not difficult to arrange; and that the charm, created by her voice should be intensified and fixed by the beauty of her person and the wealth of her intellect, was the most natural thing in the world. Equally natural was it that he should escort her home, sometimes in her brother's company, more often alone; for Frank Barton was but an indifferent church-goer, and missed the service more frequently than he attended it. The graduate of Columbia College and Law School could always find topics of interest to discuss with a Normal College graduate. These conversations, sometimes, remained unfinished when the young couple arrived at the end of their walk, and necessitated a visit in the house on Walter's part to complete them. From formal Sunday visits of a few minutes' duration to familiar comings of an evening, was a step insensibly but surely taken. On these occasions the heavier, learned topics were, by a sort of tacit consent laid aside and two hours delightfully spent with the great poets and composers.

Two of the happiest years which either of them had known thus passed by, and though no word of tender affection was exchanged between them, eyes spoke love to eyes which spoke back again.

True love is ever bashful and distrustful of itself. It was not very long for Walter to make up his mind that he loved Blanche to distraction, but did she, would she return his affection? That was the rub which made him pause, it was that which kept his lips sealed to the one all over-mastering topic in which he could pour out his heart in a torrent of fiery words. Besides he remembered his father's injunction, and he did not break silence even to him until he thought that he had positively interpreted the blush which overspread Blanche's features, the glad light which sparkled in her eyes, and the eager welcome with which she received his periodical visits.

Dear Blanche!

Walter had had no need of all this reticence on his part, at any time during the last year or so.

He was her heart's idol, her ideal of manhood, her hero, her anything that she was ready to fall down and worship. His manly form haunted her dreams by night, her hours of instruction by day-time. It required all the effort of her proud will to concentrate her mind on the lessons she was required to teach. His affability, his courtesy, his intellectual vigor—everything which makes man beloved by woman, was the constant subject of her thoughts. Even in church she no longer sang to God for the congregation, but only to him and for him alone.

Yet with the same pride of her school-girl days she buried her secret deep, deep within her heart. What was she after all? A poor orphan earning her livelihood by a daily routine of labor, her present one of incessant toil, her future without any of the great expectations of ordinary society belles.

And he? The rector's son inheriting a fame which he would make even grander by his own talents.

What right had she to aspire to become the wife of one who moved in the highest circles of society, to whom every door was open, for whom the wealthiest heiresses were setting caps, who had but to demand in order to receive, together with a lovely and accomplished wife, that fortune so necessary to the realization of the lofty aims of his legitimate ambitions?

It is true he had shown some pleasure in her society, but what of that? Her company had been agreeable to him; it had served to while away an evening when he was not engaged in dancing attendance on some gay butterfly of fashion. Had he spoken of love to her? Had he shown her, aught but the ordinary courtesy shown to her sex?

No, no! Her secret must never be known—at least not until he, himself, asked her to reveal it.

And thus she imprisoned her love in her heart, where it beat and fluttered like any bird in a cage, waiting for him to set it free.

If, in spite of all her firm resolves, her glances sometimes betrayed her, if she could not, at all times, control her blushes or receive him with an assumed indifference, it was because human nature will overleap artificial restraints, and love laughs at more things than locksmiths.

There was one person who observed and watched this growing intimacy with not very favorable eyes. That person was Frank Barton, Blanche's brother.

He was five years older than she, being about the same age as Walter. In features he resembled his sister, but in nothing else. A single phrase will best describe him. He was, what is called, a man-about-town.

From a clerkship, in a broker's office, he had graduated into a full fledged broker, though his office was generally in his hat, when it was not on the curb stone in front of the stock exchange. Sometimes he was a bull, sometimes a bear; as a general thing, he was short either way, and then his sister had to set him up in business again with part of her earnings.

His prime necessity was money, and he was always indulging in every sort of scheme how to obtain it, and plenty of it, without ever striking the simplest of all plans, which was to go to work and honestly earn it. There were two schemes which he clung to with the utmost confidence in their efficacy and feasibility.

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The first was to marry a rich girl himself, and the second to procure a wealthy husband for his sister.

He was in no hurry as far as he himself was concerned. He loved his idle, lounging, bachelor life too much to put the matrimonial noose around his neck, unless, indeed, there were, say, a hundred thousand dollars, at the end of the halter, and a girl with that dowry had not, as yet, turned up. With his sister, it was different, the sooner she was provided for the sooner he could draw on the exchequer of his prospective brother-in-law.

He liked that plan better, as it would enable him to make a splurge without sacrificing his personal liberty.

A man who is mean enough to live of his sister's earnings, is mean enough to trade on her beauty and accomplishments. How Blanche's ears would have tingled could she have heard how she was being hawked about the broker's office in Wall street.

With what success will appear hereafter.

Walter's suit and its probable success seemed to ruin the broker's precious scheme. A young lawyer, no matter how brilliant his expectations, was not as eligible a match, in Frank's eyes, as a banker who could draw his checks for hundreds of thousands, besides where would be the obligation to him? He would be apt to receive a copy of the rector's sermon to young men instead of money, and money was his suit.

At the very time when Walter was making up his mind to reveal to Blanche his love, and, simultaneously, what the rector had told him, Frank was speculating how he could separate them without invoking the displeasure of his sister who was his cashier.

If he could only have been present at the interview which we have already recorded, what a weapon it would have been to execute his selfish schemes.

And, as fate would have it, this weapon was to be placed in his hands.

### CHAPTER IV.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

The conversation, so fraught with important results, between the rector and his adopted son, took place on a Wednesday evening in June, the month of roses and love.

The following Sunday was the time agreed to for another of those delightful periodic visits which Walter paid to Blanche.

At eight o'clock that evening, Blanche expected his coming. She expected more, and the thought of that more left an additional blush to her beautiful features, as she surveyed them in the pier glass of the tastefully furnished parlor, in which she was waiting to receive him. The weather was already rather warm and, attired as she was in a light gauze dress with a June rose in her hair and on her bosom, it was pardonable in her that she should be proud and happy that she was beautiful.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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