POOR DOCUMENT

THE AMERICAN BARON.

(By James de Mille.)

(Continued.)

Of course you would. Well, this person followed us. I could see him very easily though he tried to avoid notice; and so at last we got to the Hermitage, and he came too. Well, you know, I think I was very much excited, and I asked Dowdy to let us go and see the cone; so she let us go. She gave no end of warnings, and we promised to do all that she said. So Ethel and I went ont, and there was the stranger. Well, I felt more excited than ever, and a little bit frightened—just a very, very tiny little bit, you know, and I teased Ethel to go to the cone. Well, the stranger kept in sight all the time, and I felt his eyes on me—I really felt them. So you know when we got at the foot of the cone, I was so excited that I was really quite beside myself, and I teased and teased, till at last Ethel consented to go up. So the men took us up on chairs, and all the time the stranger was in sight. He walked up by himself with great, big, long, strong strides. So we went on till we got to the top, and then I was wilder than ever. I didn't know that there was a particle of danger. I was dying with curiosity to look down and see where the smoke came from. The stranger was standing there too, and that's what made me so excited. I wanted to show him—I don't know what. I think my idea was to show him that I could take care of myself. So then I teased and teased, and Ethel begged and prayed and she cried, and I laughed; and there stood the stranger seeing it all, until as last I started off and ran to the top, you know.

Mrs. Willoughby shuddered and took her sister's hand.

There was no end of smoke, you know, and it was awfully unpleasant, and I got to the top, when suddenly I fainted.

Minnie paused for a moment and look-at her sister with a rueful face.

Well, now, dear, darling, the very—next—thing—that I remember is this, and it's horrid: I felt awful jolts, and found myself in the arms of a great, big, horrid man, who was running down the side of the mountain with dreadful long jumps, and I felt as though he was some horrid ogre carrying poor me away to his den to eat me up. But I didn't say one word. I wasn't much frightened. I felt provoked. I knew it was that horrid man. And then I wondered what you would say; and I thought oh, how you would scold! And then I knew this horrid man would chase me away from Italy; and then I would have to go to Turkey and have my life saved by a Mohammedan, and that was horrid.

Well, at last he stopped and laid me down. He was very gentle, though he was so big, I kept my eyes shut and lay as still as a mouse hoping that Ethel would come. But Ethel didn't. She was coming down with the chair, you know, and her men couldn't run like mine. And oh, Kitty darling, you have no idea what I suffered. This horrid man was rubbing aud pounding at my hands, and sighing and gronning. I stole a little bit of a look at him—just a little bit of a bit—and saw tears in his eyes, and a wild look of fear in his face. Then I knew that he was going to propose to me on the spot, and kept my eyes shut tighter than ever.

Well at last he hurt my hands so that I thought I'd try to make him stop. So I spoke as low I could, and asked if I was home, and he said yes.

Minnie paused.

Well? asked her sister.

Well, said Minnie, in a doleful tone, I then asked, is that you, papa dear?

Minnie stopped again.

Well? asked Mrs. Willoughby once more.

Well.

Well go on.

Well, he said—he said, Yes, darling'—and—

And what?

And he kissed me, said Minnie, in a doleful voice.

Kissed you! exclaimed her sister, with flashing eyes.

Ye-yes, stammered Minnie, in a sob; and I think it's a shame; and none of them ever did so before; and I don't want you ever to again, Kitty darling.

The miserable wretch! cried Mrs. Willoughby, indignantly.

No he isn't—he isn't that, said Minnie. He isn't a miserable wretch at all.

How could any one be so based who pretends to the name of gentleman! cried Mrs. Willoughby.

He wasn't base—and it's very wicked of you Kitty. He only pretended, you know.

Pretended!

Yes.

Pretended what?

Why, that he was my—my father you know.

Does Ethel know this? asked Mrs. Willoughby, after a curious look at Minnie.

No, of course not, nor Dowdy either; and you mustn't go and make any disturbance.

Disturbance? no; but if I ever see him, I'll let him know what I think of him, said Mrs. Willoughby severely.

But he saved my life, and so you know you can't be very harsh with him. Please don't—ple-e-ease now, Kitty darling.

Oh, you little goose, what whimsical idea have you got now?

Please don't please don't, repeated Minnie.

Oh, never mind; go on now, darling, and tell me about the rest of it.

Well, there isn't any more. I lay still, you know, and at last Ethel came; and then we went back to Dowdy, and then we came home, you know.

Well, I hope you've lost him.

Lost him? Oh no; I never do. They always will come. Besides, this one will, I know.

Why?

Because he said so,

Said so? when?

Yesterday.

Yesterday?

Yes; we met him.

Who?

Dowdy and I. We were out driving. We stopped and spoke to him. He was dreadfully earnest and awfully embarrassed, and I know he was going to propose; so I kept whispering to myself all the time, 'Oh, please don't—please don't;' but I know he will; and he'll be here soon too.

He sha'nt. I won't let him. I'll never give him the chance.

I think you needn't be so cruel.

Cruel!

Yes; to the poor man.

Why, you don't want another man, I hope?

N-no; but then I don't want to hurt his feelings. It was awfully good of him, you know, and awfully plucky.

Well, I should think that you would prefer avoiding him, in your peculiar situation.

Yes, but he may feel hurt.

Oh, he may see you once or twice with me.

But he may want to see me alone, and what can I do?

Really now, Minnie, you must remember that you are in a serious position. There is that wretched Captain Kirby.

I know, said Minnie with a sigh.

And that dreadful American. By-the-by, darling, you have never told me his name. It isn't of any consequence, but I should like to know the American's name.

It's—Rufus K. Gunn.

Rufus K. Gunn; what a funny name! and what in the world is "K" for.

Oh, nothing. He says it is the fashion in his country to have some letter of the alphabet between one's names, and he chose K because it was so awfully uncommon. Isn't it funny, Kitty darling?

Oh dear! sighed her sister, and then there is that pertinacious Count Girasole. Think what trouble we had in getting quietly rid of him. I'm afraid all the time that he will not stay in Florence, as he said, for he seems to have no fixed abode. First, he was going to Rome, and then Venice, and at last he committed himself to a statement that he had to remain at Florence, and so enabled us to get rid of him. But I know he will come upon us again somewhere, and then we'll have all the trouble over again. Oh dear! Well, Minnie darling, do you know the name of this last one?

Oh yes.

What is it?

It's a funny name, said Minnie, a very funny name.

Tell it to me.

It's Scone Dacres; and isn't that a funny name.

Mrs. Willoughby started at the mention of that name. Then she turned away her head, and did not say a word for a long time.

Kitty!

No answer.

Kitty darling, what's the matter?

Mrs. Willoughby turned her head once more. Her face was quite calm and her voice had its usual tone, as she asked:

Say that name again.

Scone Dacres, said Minnie.

Scone Dacres, repeated Mrs. Willoughby; what sort of a man is he?

Big—very—awfully big! said Minnie. Great big head and broad shoulders, Great big arms, that carried me as if I were a feather; big beard too, and it tickled me so when he—he pretended that he was my father; and very sad. And oh, I know I should be so awfully fond of him. And, oh, Kitty darling, what do you think?

What, dearest?

Why, I'm—I'm afraid—I'm really beginning to—to—like him—just a little tiny bit, you know.

Scone Dacres! repeated Mrs. Willoughby who didn't seem to have heard the last effusion. Scone Dacres! Well, darling, don't trouble yourself; he shan't trouble you.

But I want him to, said Minnie.

Oh, nonsense, child.

CHAPTER X.

A FEARFUL DISCOVERY.

A few days after this Hawbury was in his room, when Dacres entered.

Hallo, old man, what's up now? How goes the war? said Hawbury. But what the mischief is the matter? You look cut up. Your brow is sad; your eyes beneath flash like a falchion from its sheath. What's happened? You look half snubbed and half desperate.

Dacres said not a word, but flung himself into a chair with a look that suited Hawbury's description of him quite accurately. His brows lowered into a heavy frown, his lips were compressed and his breath came quick and hard through his inflated nostrils. He sat thus for some time without taking any notice whatever of his friend, and at length lighted a cigar, which he smoked as he often did when excited, in great voluminous puffs. Howbury said nothing, but after one or two quick glances at his friend, rang a bell and ordered some Bass.

Here old fellow, said he drawing the attention of Dacres to the refreshing draught. Take some—Quaff, oh, quaff this kind nepenthe, and forget thy lost Lenore.

Dacres at this gave a heavy sigh that sounded like a groan, and swallowed several tumblers in quick succession.

Hawbury! said he at length, in a half stifled voice.

Well, old man?

I've had a blow to-day full on the breast that fairly staggers me.

By Jove!

Fact. I've just come from a mad ride along the shore. I've been mad I think for two or three hours. Of all the monstrous, abominable, infernal and unheard-of catastrophes this is the worst.

He stopped, and puffed away desperately at his cigar,

Don't keep a fellow in suspense this way, said Hawbury at last. What's up? Out with it, man.

Well you know yesterday I called there.

Hawbury nodded.

She was not at home.

So you said.

You know she really wasn't, for I told you that I met their carriage. The whole party were in it, and on the front seat beside Minnie there was another lady. This is the one that I had not seen before. She makes the fourth in the party. She and Minnie had their backs turned as they came up. The other ladies bowed as they passed, and as I held off my hat I half turned to catch Minnie's eyes, when I caught sight of the face of the lady. It startled me so much that I was thunder-struck, and stood there with my hat off after they had passed me for sometime,

You said nothing about that, old chap. Who the deuce could she have been?

No, I said nothing about it. As I cantered off I began to think that it was only a fancy of mine, and finally I was sure of it and laughed it off. For, you must know that the lady's face looked astonishingly like a certain face that I don't particularly care to see—certainly not in such close connection with Minnie. But you see I thought it might be my fancy, so I finally shook off the feeling, and said nothing to you about it.

Dacres paused here and rubbed his hands violently over his hair at the place where the scar was, and then frowning heavily resumed:

Well this afternoon I called again. They were at home. One was Lady Dalrymple, and the others were Minnie and her friend Ethel—either her friend or her sister. I think she is her sister. Well, I sat for about five minutes, and was just beginning to feel the full sense of my happiness, when the door opened and another lady entered. Hawbury,—and Dacres's tones deepened into an awful solemnity—Hawbury it was the lady that I saw in the carriage yesterday One look at her was enough. I was assured then that my impressions yesterday were not dreams, but the damnable and abhorrent truth!

What impressions—you haven't told me yet, you know?

Wait a minute. I rose as she entered, and confronted her. She locked at me calmly, and then stood as though expecting to be introduced. There was no emotion visible whatever. She was prepared for it; I was not; and so she was as cool as when I saw her last, and what is more just as young and beautiful.

The devil! cried Hawbury.

Dacres poured out another glass of ale and drank it. His hands trembled slightly as he put down the glass and he sat for some time in thought before he went on.

Well, Lady Dalrymple introduced us. It was Mrs. Willoughby!

By Jove! cried Hawbury. I saw you were coming to that.

Well, you know the whole thing was so sudden, so unexpected, and so perfectly over-whelming, that I stood transfixed. I said nothing. I believe I bowed and then some how or other, I really don't know how, I got away, and mounting my hourse, rode off like a mad-man. Then I came home, and here you see me.

There was silence now for some time.

Are you sure that it is your wife?

Of course I am. How could I be mistaken.

Are you sure the name was Willoughby?

Perfectly sure.

And that is the name your wife took?

Yes; I told you so before, didn't I?

Yes. But think now, mightn't there be some mistake?

Pooh! how could there be any mistake?

Didn't you see any change in her?

No, only that she looked much more quiet than she used to. Not so active, you know. In her best days she was always excitable, and a little demonstrative; but now she seems to have sobered down, and is as quiet and well bred as any of the others.

Was there not any change in her at all?

Not so much as I would have supposed; certainly not so much as there is in me. But then I've been knocking about all over the world, and she has been living a life of peace and calm, with the sweet consciousness of having triumphed over a hated husband, and possessing a handsome competency. Now she mingles in the best society. She associates with lords and ladies. She enjoys life in England, while I am an exile. No doubt she passes for a fine young widow. No doubt too she has lots of admirers. They aspire to her hand. They write poetry to her. They make love to her. Confound her!

Dacres's voice grew more and more agitated and excited as he spoke, and at length his tirade against his wife ended in something that was almost a roar.

Hawbury said nothing. but listened with his face full of sympathy. At last his pent-up feeling found expression in his favorite expression, by Jove!

Wouldn't I be justified in wringing her neck? asked Dacres after a pause. And what's worse, he continued, without waiting for an answer to his question—what's worse, her presence here in this unexpected way has given me, me, mind you, a sense of guilt, while she is, of course, immaculate. I, mind you—I, the injured husband, with a scar on my head from a wound made by her hand, and all the ghosts of my ancestor showling curses over me at night for my desolated and ruined home—I am to be conscience-stricken in her presence as if I were a felon while she, the really guilty one—the blight and bitter destruction of my life—she is to appear before me now as injured, and must make her appearance here, standing by the side of that sweet child-angel and warning me away. Confound it all, man! Do you mean to say that such a thing is to be borne?

Dacres was now quite frantic; so Hawbury, with a sigh of perplexity, lighted a fresh cigar, and thus took refuge from the helplessness of his position. It was clearly a state of things in which advice was utterly useless, and consolation impossible What could he advise, or what consolation could he offer? The child-angel was now out of his friend's reach, and the worst fears of the lover were more than realized.

I told you I was afraid of this, continued Dacres. I had a suspicion that she was alive, and I firmly believe that she will outlive me forty years; but I must say I never expected to see her in this way, under such circumstances. And then to find her so infernally beautiful. Confound her! she don't look over twenty-five. How the mischief does she manage it? Oh, she's a deep one! But perhaps she's changed. She seems so calm, and came into the room so gently, and looked at me steadily. Not a tremor, not a shake, as I live. Calm sir; cool as steel; and hard too. She looked away and then looked back. They were searching glances, as though they read me through and through. Well, there was no occasion for that. She ought to know Scone Dacres well enough, I swear. Cool! And there stood I, with the blood flashing to my head, and throbbing fire underneath the scar of her wound—hers—her own property, for she made it! That was the woman who kicked me, that struck at me, that caused the destruction of my ancestral home, that drove me into exile, and that now drives me back from my love. But, by Heaven! it'll take more than her to do it; and I'll show her again, as I showed her once before, that Scone Dacres is her master. And, by Jove, she will find that it will take more than herself to keep me away from Minnie Fay.

See here, old boy, said Hawbury, you may as well throw up the sponge.

I won't, said Dacres, gruffly.

You see it isn't your wife that you have to consider, but the girl; and do you think the girl or her friends would have a married man paying his attention in that quarter? Would you have the face to do it under your own wife's eye? By Jove!

The undeniable truth of this assertion was felt by Dacres even in his rage But the very fact it was unanswerable, and that he was helpless, only served to deepen and intensify his rage. Yet he said nothing; it was only in his face and manner that his rage was manifested. He appeared almost to suffocate under the rush of fierce, contending passion; big distended veins swelled out in his forehead, which was also drawn far down in a gloomy frown; his breath came thick and fast, and his hands were clenched tight together. Hawbary watched him in silence as before, feeling all the time the impossibility of saying any thing that could be of any use whatever.

Well, old fellow, said Dacres at last, giving a long breath, in which he seemed to throw off some of his excitement, you're right, of course, and I am helpless. There's no chance for me. Paying attensions is out of the question, and the only thing for me to do is to give up the whole thing. But that isn't to be done at once. It's been long since I've seen any one for whom I felt any tenderness, and this little thing, I know, is fond of me. I can't quit her at once. I must stay on for a time, at least, and have occasional glimpses at her. It gives me a fresh sense of almost heavenly sweetness to look at her fair young face. Betides, I feel that I am far more to her than any other man, No other man has stood to her in the relation in which I have stood. Recollect how I saved her from death. That is no light thing. She must feel toward me as she has never felt to any other. She is not one who can forget how I snatched her from a fearful death, and brought her back to life. Every time she looks at me she seems to convey all that to me in her glance.

Oh, well, my dear fellow, really now, said Hawbury, just think. You can't do any thing.

But I don't want to do any thing,

It never can end in anything, you know.

But I don't want it to end in anything.

You'll only bother her by entangling her affections.

But I don't want to entangle her affections.

Then what the mischief do you want to do?

To be Continued.

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