

Marriage of Barry Wicklow

By RUBY M. AYRES
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(Continued from Yesterday.)

Had it always really existed? He asked himself, with a sort of shock. Had there always been a sort of veiled hostility between them that had never shown itself until this moment?

He was so easy-going himself; it had never once entered his head that perhaps Norman had always been jealous of him, had always resented his adoption.

Norman had picked up his hat and coat. He sauntered to the door with an assumption of carelessness he was far from feeling.

"You are—waiting, I suppose?" he submitted, insolently.

"Yes," said Barry. "I am."

When his cousin had gone he went over to the window and flung it wide. He hated the smell of scented cigarettes in the room. Norman always affected scented cigarettes. It struck him for the first time that there were quite a number of other things about this cousin of his that he also hated.

It was a shock to his happy-go-lucky nature; he was a man who wished to be friends with everyone. He could not understand why it had been such an easy thing to quarrel with Norman. This had been an eventful day. First the scene with his uncle, then Agnes, and now Norman. He wondered if it had been his own fault in each case; it seemed improbable.

Norman had said preposterous things about that night at the theater, for instance. Barry's blood boiled. What an uncharitable world it was. He took up arms in passionate defence of the girl who had sat beside him with such quiet attention. He supposed he had Mrs. Baring to thank for all the gossip; he had always distrusted that woman.

He glanced at his watch—nearly five. He rang the bell, and asked the maid if she knew what time Mr. Wicklow would be in.

"He said about five, sir. He said if anybody called I was to be sure to ask them to wait."

"Meaning me, I suppose," Barry thought grimly, as she went away. He wished he had not come; he had only walked into further unpleasantness. He had almost decided not to wait when he heard his uncle's step outside, and a moment later he was in the room.

He looked pleased to see Barry. He greeted him heartily. "I hope you haven't been waiting long," he said.

Barry did not answer; he knew what his uncle was assuming. He wondered how he was to disillusion him.

Mr. Wicklow brought out a box of cigars.

"About our little conversation this morning," he said, tentatively. "I've been making a few enquiries, Barry, and I hear that this girl is—most undesirable, shall we say? My informant was quite a disinterested party. No, I shall not mention names, but I am more determined than ever to put a stop to this nonsense with Norman."

"It will be a hard job," said Barry flatly. "Norman isn't a child."

"He is an extremely foolish youth," Mr. Wicklow asserted calmly. "This is not the first time I have had this trouble with him, as you know."

Barry knew it well enough. He had a vivid recollection of other occasions when Norman had wanted to rush off and get married to some girl who had taken his fancy, occasions when he had declared himself self-broken hearted and his life ruined if opposition prevented him from doing so. But he made no comment.

"I look to you, Barry," said Mr. Wicklow again, "to help me."

Barry moved restlessly. "I can't—I hate the job! Besides, it's pure conceit to think I could do it. I'm sorry, but it's no good."

Mr. Wicklow drew his chair closer to the table, and leaned his arms on it, looking earnestly at his nephew.

"Barry," he said, "I'll pay your debts and give you 5,000 pounds besides if you'll do this for me. Norman is my only son; it will break his mother's heart if he marries this girl. Besides, it can't be a serious attachment; I know him so well. It's not him I am afraid of, but the girl. She means to have him, she'll marry him before he knows where he is—before he realizes that he is making a complete fool of himself. He held out his hand. "Come, Barry, it's not much I'm asking you, just a harmless flirtation, a transfer of affections—temporarily."

Barry did not look up; he was thinking of his cousin as he had looked not half an hour ago, his sneering words, with their hidden dislike and veiled animosity, and something in his heart longed to be able to hit back—hard!

After all, perhaps it was not a serious attachment! Norman had had so many similar affairs, and they had all ended in smoke. He raised his eyes and met his uncle's. After a moment he put out his hand, unwillingly enough, and took the elder man's.

"Oh, all right," he said gruffly. "If you're sure it's not serious; and if I fail, you're not serious; and if I fail, you're not serious."

Mr. Wicklow laughed. "You

won't fail, Barry," he said confidently. "I know you."

Agnes Dudley waited a whole day for Barry to come back and eat humble-pie. She was so sure that his passionate anger had not been final; she knew him so well, she told herself. His anger was like champagne, all fizzle and fuss at first, but soon dying down.

Of course, he had not been serious when he said he never wished to see her again. She had only to wait and he would turn up to sue humbly for forgiveness.

But the hours dragged by and there was no Barry. Every time a bell rang she was sure it must be he; every time a taxi raced down the street her heart began to throb in eager anticipation. But a whole day passed, and there was no Barry.

She began to torture herself with doubts. Supposing he never came again; supposing for once in his life he really meant what he said; supposing this time she had driven him a little too far?

When evening came she could bear it no longer. She rang up Barry's rooms. The phone was answered by the maid. "Mr. Wicklow was out," she said.

"Out!" Agnes Dudley echoed the word eagerly. "Do you—of course you don't know if he is coming to see me this evening? I am Mrs. Dudley."

There was a little pause; she could hear the heavy beating of her heart. Then the maid's voice, answering deprecatingly:

"I couldn't say, I am sure, ma'am, but—Mr. Wicklow said he was going out of town. He took a portmanteau with him, ma'am, and told me he did not expect to be back for a fortnight."

Agnes caught her breath. "Out of town! Oh, where has he gone?" There was a ring of very genuine distress in her voice. "Surely he left an address?"

But the answer came back with unmistakable truth.

"No, ma'am, Mr. Wicklow left no address, and he said he should not be wanting any of his letters sent on."

CHAPTER III.

Once Barry Wicklow made up his mind to do a thing he went on with it right away; he never allowed himself time in which to reconsider it, which was sometimes a good thing, sometimes a bad.

In this case he did not much care how it turned out. He made his few preparations recklessly. His heart was still full of a smouldering anger against Agnes Dudley, and against his cousin. He considered that they had both treated him rottenly. His one gratification, as he listened to his uncle's last words of instruction, was that he hoped he was about to pay them both out; he considered that he did not care in the least what happened.

"You haven't told me the name of the blessed girl," he said presently, with irritation. "How on earth am I to find her?"

Mr. Wicklow produced a letter from his pocket.

"Don't be so impatient, my dear boy," he said mildly, more mildly than Barry had ever heard him speak before. "I can give you all the information you require. The girl's name is Hazel Bentley. He paused and looked at Barry. "A ridiculous name!" he said, with exasperation. "It savours of the theater."

Barry was scribbling the name on the back of an envelope. "Rather a pretty name," he said absently. "Address, please."

Mr. Wicklow referred again to his letter. "Cleave Farm, Bedmund," he said. "I understand that she lives with an uncle who is a small farmer."

He folded the letter and restored it to his pocket. "And now, Barry, if you can give me some idea as to what you propose to do—"

Barry gave an impatient exclamation. "I haven't any more idea than the dead. I shall put it at an inn, I suppose, if there is one, and have a look round."

He laughed shamefacedly. "I sounds like a romance of the dark ages," he said, with a sort of savagery. "I'm the villain of the piece, plotting to carry off the fair heroine."

He looked at his shoulders. "Well—if I fail—"

"You won't fail," said Mr. Wicklow, positively.

There was a moment's silence.

"After all," he went on rather uncomfortably, "there's nothing in the whole proceeding. You simply work up a harmless flirtation."

"It won't be so easy to do. Supposing Norman takes it into his head to come down? A nice sort of fool I shall look with him chipping in and wanting to punch my head."

"Norman won't chip in," as you put it," his uncle assured him. "I am taking Norman home with me to-night and keeping him there—indeed."

"He may refuse to stay."

Mr. Wicklow dismissed the idea as unworthy of consideration.

"You get away first thing in the morning," he said. "There's nothing like striking while the iron is hot, Barry; and when you get there—"

He smiled rather nervously at Barry's sudden face—"well, I'll back an Irishman all the world over to win a girl's heart quicker than any other man."

Barry's face flamed. "Confound it all, I don't want the wretched girl's heart," he said wrathfully. "If it's going to mean anything like that—"

Mr. Wicklow saw he had made a mistake; he rose to his feet. "I was only chaffing, my boy. It doesn't mean anything like that. Get her to break with Norman—that's all I want; and if anything unforeseen should happen, trust me to stand by you."

"The only thing that will happen will be that I come back in 24 hours," Barry declared, but he beamed up a little; after all there would be a certain amount of fun in it, he thought, and if this Hazel, whatever her name was, chose to give him the cold shoulder he could but pack his traps and catch a train home and leave Norman to his fate.

He went to bed and slept soundly in spite of the fact that he was a recently jilted man; he woke up feeling remarkably fit and ready for anything.

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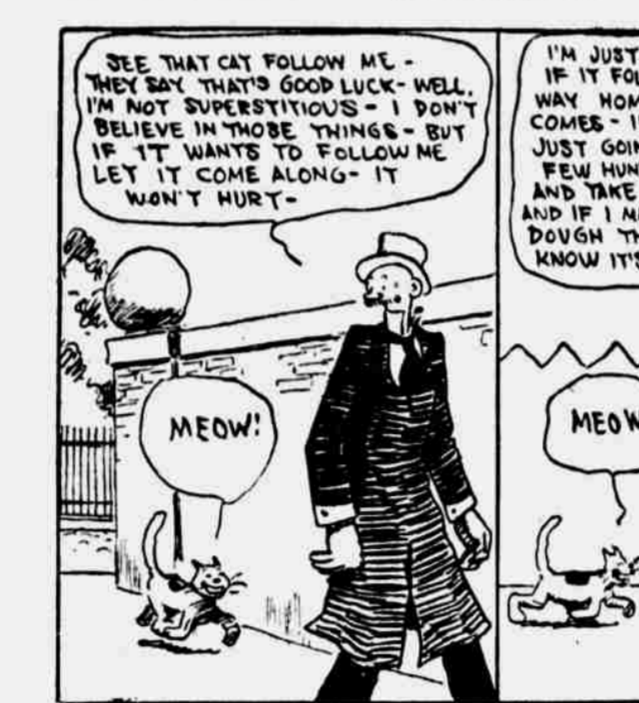
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He was just ready to leave his rooms when the telephone bell whirred; Barry hesitated, staring doubtfully at the receiver, then he went over and took it down.

It was Mr. Wicklow—Barry frowned a little as he listened to his complacent voice.

"That you, my boy? Good! I just thought you'd like to know that Norman has sprained his ankle and will have to lie up for a week or two; so you needn't be afraid that he'll turn up at Bedmund. How did he do it? Getting out of a taxi, I believe. I'm taking him down to his mother this morning. We had to stay in town last night, after all."

There was a little pause. "Well, goody and good luck," said Mr. Wicklow.

Barry hung up the receiver without answering; on the whole he was rather relieved to hear of Norman's accident. It gave him a free hand; he felt almost cheerful as he threw his bag into a taxi and told the man to drive to King's Cross.

It was a sunny morning, and sunshine always affected Barry's spirits; he leaned forward, whistling softly,

and looked at himself in the narrow strip of mirror.

(Continued in The Bee Tomorrow.)

Midland Teacher Accepts New Job by Radio Message

Grand Island, Neb., July 13.—(Special.)—Accept. Presidency! These two words comprised the radio answer of Dr. Krueger of Midland college, Fremont, when advised on board a ship destined for Europe, that he had been elected president of Midland college to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Dr. Stauffer. A letter has now been received by the board of trustees of Midland in which Dr. Krueger writes from Leipzig, Germany, whether he went for further study in theology and for the purpose of writing a book, to thank the board for the confidence placed in him.

Coverdale to Speak at Gibbon Annual Picnic

Kearney, Neb., July 13.—(Special.)—The Buffalo County Farm bureau annual picnic will be held at Gibbon on July 20. J. W. Coverdale, secretary of the American Farm Bureau

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Good and Merciful God, who, according to Thy mercy and loving kindness, forgivest the sins of such as repent and graciously remittest the guilt of their past offenses, mercifully regard Thy servants and grant them full remission of their sins who most earnestly begs it of Thee. Renew, O most loving Father! whatsoever has been corrupted in them through the frailty of human nature, or violated through the deceits of the devil; make them true members of Thy faith, and let them partake of the fruits of the redemption. Have compassion, O Lord! on their tears, and admit them, who hath no hope but in Thee, to the sacraments of Thy reconciliation. Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

(From the Roman Rituals)

Bee Want Ads Produce Results.

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