

# A Fascinating Love Tangle of Youth and Today

(Continued from Preceding Page.) strates with her for piling up expenses which are beyond both their incomes, she says, 'I don't cost you a halfpenny, do I? Surely you don't begrudge me some little luxuries which I can earn by hard work?' That's what Beauty used to say. She was so independent that I could not safeguard her from the dangers of independence. She would go gadding off with people who had no scruples of honor, no care for my good name, no thought for my existence, and because she could say, 'I pay.' I had no check upon her. But she didn't pay. In the long run I paid, with a broken life. You said, Nick, my poor motherless son."

"Perhaps if you had been more kind with her she would not have gone gadding off," said Nick.

Bristles stared at him. This father was stricken because out of his past a ghost had come to claim his son. The law had given him the custody of the child, but Nature, greater than the law, had allowed the memory of the mother to wrest Nick's heart from him, and poison Nick's mind against him. He had been the comrade of his son for more than ten years now, since his wife had deserted them. He had watched over him, tended him, given him all that was bes-

something in the line of his mouth, something about his eyes which reminded Bristles of Beauty in one of her tempers, when she lost control of herself, and said bitter, cruel things, which stabbed him like daggers. This strange likeness to the woman who had been his wife was so vivid, so startling at that moment that the man seemed to see the woman's spirit suddenly stare at him through the mask of the boy's face. He knew that the words trembling up to the boy's lips would be cruel words. Before they were spoken he shrank from them.

"You are brutal," said Nick, through his clenched teeth. "I think you were a brute to Beauty, and I'm not surprised she ran away from you."

Bristles sprang up from his chair, as white as Nick, and the father and son stood facing each other, staring into each other's eyes, breathing jerkily. It was a moment of enormous tragedy. Outside the open window there was the whisper of the great sea, as its calm waves ruffled upon the moist sands. Inside the room the clock ticked with a steady

clock swung from one side to the other. Then Bristles spoke, and his voice was hollow and lifeless:

"One day you will be sorry for having said those words."

That was all. Then he moved uncertainly across the room, fumbled with the matches on the sideboard and lit a candle. It was early for bed, but he went upstairs into his bedroom with a heavy tread. It was the first time in Nick's memory that his father had not said good-night.

In the days that followed neither of them alluded by any word to that conversation. The name of Beauty did not pass their lips. The emotion that had stirred each of them to the depths seemed forgotten and buried beneath new interests. Their old relations of comradeship seemed re-established. They laughed and chatted, discussed plans for the future, went on long, lonely walks, when Nick spoke of his ambitions with apparent candor, and received

as much chance of getting to the moon."

"You will never get to the moon if you look no higher than the earth," said Miss Lavenham. "I want you to look as high as the stars and to reach up to them. You can do that if you like."

"Unfortunately I am the son of a poor man," said Nick.

"Rubbish!" said Miss Lavenham. "It's only poverty that gets the gold in the stars. If your father were a rich man you would never be anything but a silly amateur. You've got to be an artist, Nick, which means a man who lives for and by his craft."

"By Jove!" said Nick. "If only I had the chance of doing it!"

"You have a man's chance," said Miss Lavenham. "We will see that you have it."

That "we" embraced the little group of people who had constituted themselves into a committee for the honor and glory of Nicholas Barton. It included Polly, who, when this idea of the Academy Schools had become a fixed idea, discussed separately and collectively, drew Nicholas aside one day and said in a whisper:

"Master Nick, I have got a little bit to help you into them schools. It ain't much, dear heart, but you know my love goes with it."

She thrust into his hand an old leather purse which bulged out as though it were full of coins.

What a ridiculous idea!" said Nick. "As if we could ever do without you!"

"Well, then!" said Polly triumphantly, lifting up the piece of dough, and flinging it down on the board again. "As long as I'm drawing my wages what more do I want? I can't eat more than three meals a day, can I? You don't want me to take a jaunt over to Paris and indulge in an orgy of wickedness do you?"

"No," said Nick, laughing at the preposterous idea. "I shouldn't think of your doing such a thing. But I can't take your money, all the same, Polly."

Polly left her pastry, and flung her floury arms round Nick.

"Dear poppet, though you're too old to be called a poppet, but always will be to me, just take it toward the expenses of them schools, and don't say another word to your poor old nurse that would let you tread over her body if it would be any good to you. Your Pa is a poor man, but every bit of them savings have come out of the sweat of his brow, so that it's only giving back what's his and yours."

Nick kissed her, as he used to in his baby days, though now he was so tall that he looked down upon her.

"I will take the purse," he said, "but only as a loan, Polly."

She was satisfied with that, though she muttered something about "loan be hanged," and she resumed her attack upon the unfortunate piece of dough with renewed energy and great cheerfulness of spirits.

Polly's generosity was equaled, though not surpassed, except in

and the boy who was fast growing into a man, had filled up a gap in the hearts of these middle-aged people by the spirit of youth, and that his companionship had kept them from growing old and rusty before their time. To Mary Lavenham he had been like one of her dream children, and she had mothered him, in spite of his shyness of her. To Edward Frampton he had been the image of his own unspoiled youth, and a young knight with untarnished armor. To Captain Muffett, the old "Admiral," he had been a comrade with whom he had grown young again. They had carved out many boats together! They had sailed up the estuary on many breezy days. The withered old heart of a man who had known tragedy had flowered into a second childhood when Nick came to ask his questions. Nick did not know those things then. He only felt fearful lest he might not prove himself worthy of their faith in him. And on the last night, when they assembled in his father's sitting-room, when the Admiral made a prayer over a bowl of punch, and after drinking to Nick's health and to his prosperous voyage on a fair sea, ended with an Amen, and wiped his eye with his handanna handkerchief; when Edward Frampton, not touching the punch, made a fine speech in which he quoted many lines from the poets upon honor and glory, and the splendor of youth; when Miss Lavenham sat very still and quiet until her turn came to speak and she made a fairy-tale of Nick's way through the worlds of art, until he reached the high peaks of eternal beauty after many strug-

Beauty and the face of Joan came to him and intermingled, so that they seemed one face, with a little teasing smile about the lips.

CHAPTER X.  
Nicholas in London.

QUITE a number of actors and playgoers in London became familiar with the face of a young man, hardly more than a boy, who was often to be seen waiting in the queues outside the galleries, or standing at a little distance from the stage doors with an eager and searching look when the actresses came hurrying up before a performance. Suburban girls who were devotees of popular players noticed this young man partly because he did not seem to notice them. If he happened to be standing near them in a queue he paid no attention to their chatter, and did not turn his head when they giggled, and did not vouchsafe a glance at their prettiness, but stood self-absorbed, intensely introspective, with a dreaminess in his eyes. Now and again one of these girls would nudge her companion, and whisper, "There's that handsome boy again! Do you remember, we saw him at the first night of the new Gaiety piece?"—or when they passed him, standing a little aloof, outside a stage door, they would smile at each other and say, "He always seems looking for some one."



In his heart and brain, out all that counted for nothing now, and the woman who had abandoned the duties of her motherhood, who had forsaken the child of her flesh, had stretched out an unseen hand to capture the boy. Nick's last anger, not against Nick, but against this cruelty.

"My kindness to her was thrown away on a light-of-love. The woman was vile to the core."

Nick rose from his chair, white to the lips.

"You mustn't say that," he said, staring at his father with burning eyes.

Bristles was reckless now. His son had demanded the truth, and he must learn it.

"She was eaten up with vanity—a colossal, devilish vanity which destroyed any faint touch of moral decency which may have been in her nature at the beginning. Any recollection who pandered to her appetite for adulation made her forget her honor as a wife. That man, that beast with whom she went away, was not the first to tempt her to betray me, not the first to succeed. By God! I was patient with her and forgiving! God knows I warned her, and pleaded with her, and pardoned her, until her last treachery. She walked open-eyed into the spider's web. Nick, my boy, your mother was as false as hell."

Nick did not answer for a moment. He was standing very straight and still, with that white face of his and burning eyes. His mouth had hardened. There was

beat, more noisy than the world beyond the cottage. The night was so quiet, the silence brooding over sea and shore was so intense, that the open window seemed like a great ear listening to this quarrel between the man and boy, and the moon which shone like a lantern within the square window frame seemed to stare curiously at the two human beings whose comradeship had been smashed by a woman's sin. In that moment when the father faced his son, when the son faced his father, with an emotion not less passionate because it was of a deadly quietude, each knew that this was a moral earthquake which had shaken the foundations upon which, until now, they seemed to have stood so securely. Each knew that a gulf had opened up between them for which, as yet, the bridge had not been built. It seemed to Nick that all his life since Beauty had gone away when he stood as the accuser and judge of the man from whom she had fled. His waking dreams of her, the fragrant memories which had haunted him, his yearnings of childhood, his passionate regrets, had been storing up facts upon which his father was condemned. Because the only facts which counted with him were those witnesses in his own heart which spoke of Beauty, and pleaded as counsels in her defense.

It seemed like an hour that the father stood facing his son. It was just the time in which the heavy pendulum of the grandfather's

the warm encouragement and anxious hopefulness of the man who had been his counsellor and guide from babyhood. But they knew that neither of them would ever forget the words spoken in the silence of the world, when the sea lay calm outside the window, and that a gulf was between them, even when they walked shoulder by shoulder across the sand-dunes.

It was Mary Lavenham who had the deciding voice in the councils which were held on the subject of Nick's career, shared by Edward Frampton, Captain Muffett and Polly, with Bristles in the background, anxious, balancing the pros and cons, hesitating in his approval of any definite plan.

Mary Lavenham's first expression of opinion had been uttered in her forcible way when she had stood behind Nick's shoulder when he was sitting down by the estuary doing a charcoal sketch of some boats lying on the mud and of some sailors mending their nets.

"Do you think it comes all right?" said Nick.

"It is better than all right," said Miss Lavenham. "It is so good that it is a crime for you to be pottering away here when you ought to be getting the best training and beginning a great career. I have nothing more to teach you. You have left me behind months ago. The Academy Schools are the place for you, Nick."

"Think so?" said Nick, very calmly, although his heart gave a great leap at her words. "Perhaps I have

"I don't cost you a halfpenny, do I? Surely you don't begrudge me some little luxuries which I can earn by hard work?"

Nick stared at the purse in his hand, not knowing what to do with it.

"What's all this, Polly? Do you think I want to sponge on you?"

Polly gave a ferocious dab at the piece of pastry.

"It's my savings," she said, "if you must know, and a precious lot of good they are, unless they're put to a better use than I can make of 'em!"

"Good Lord, Polly!" said Nick. "I would hang myself before I look your hard-earned money. One of these days you will want it for yourself."

"Want it for what?" asked Polly, rolling the pastry into a thin strip. "Surely your Pa will give me a decent funeral when I drop down dead in his service."

She pretended to get angry, and spoke with a great deal of indignation.

"Surely your Pa won't throw me out like an old shoe, after all these years, after looking after him in his absent-mindedness, and him as helpless as a babe unborn!"

"Of course he won't, Polly.

money values, by Nick's other friends, and when it was definitely arranged that he should go to London to attend the Academy Schools, Miss Lavenham, Edward Frampton and Captain Muffett made themselves jointly responsible for his fees, his father agreeing to this arrangement because it was made clear to him, after many arguments, that they all desired a share in Nick's glory. During those last days in the cottage by the sea, when he stood on the threshold of the young manhood, facing at last the great adventure when he would go forth to seek his fortune, to stand alone, to put himself to the test of life, he was overwhelmed with a sense of thankfulness for these good friends who believed in him, more than he believed in himself, and he realized with humility and self-abasement how often he had taken their favors for granted and behaved with the selfishness and arrogance of boyhood. He did not understand that he had given back more than he received. That the child who had grown into a boy

gles, many failures, many moments of despair, and lastly when Bristles was left alone with him, and kissed him before the last good-night in this cottage by the sea, and said, "I shall miss you horribly, old man. I must join you as soon as possible," then Nick's heart was filled to overflowing, so that his eyes were moist with tears, and he could not speak. In the loneliness of his little room that night he sat on the side of his bed until the candle flickered out, and even then he sat in the darkness thinking of the boyhood that was passing and of the manhood that was coming. The thrill of the great adventure had already stirred him. Ambition, the colossal ambition of youth, quickened his pulse, and the thought of going back to London, which had haunted his imagination, the mist of memory, excited him like a powerful drug. For in London were the two dream-faces which had haunted his imagination, and in the crowd he might find them again. As once before, when he lay down to sleep, the face of

I expect he's fallen in love with an actress girl's face on a picture postcard. I wish I had her luck!"

It was Nicholas Barton, who, after his days of study at the Academy Schools, came like a moth to the candle, to every new play produced in London. After a year of plays many of them bored him unutterably. Often he would sit in the gallery staring down upon some new musical comedy, or some new problem play, with unseeing eyes, after he had scanned the faces of the actresses, without finding the face of his desire, through a pair of opera glasses which he had bought by economizing over his meals. For a time the glitter and glare of the musical comedies had been wonderful to him, as all this new life in London was wonderful. For a time each new problem play filled him with new perplexities, opened his eyes to new tragedies in the relations between men and women, and stirred up uneasy thoughts about his own temperament and instincts. But the time came when he became almost as blasé as most regular playgoers, and his critical faculties wore off the sharp edge of his appetite for drama, so that he was no longer excited by a dreary piece of realism, nor ravished by a mere display of plump girls in extravagant frocks, as in the days of his first simplicity. Nevertheless he continued to go to the theatre on many nights when he was not hard at work in the little studio of the Fulham Road which he shared with his great comrade, Jack Cymene—had not yielded to the solicitations of that recklessly extravagant fellow to dine on the fleshpots of Sobor when he was not wandering on long lonely walks of exploration in and about London, watching the human drama of the streets and searching into life with that insatiable curiosity with which he had been born.

(To Be Continued.)