

That Deceptive Telegram

by Chas. C. Hahn

The Rev. Alfred Brown, Rector of St. Marks, Quincy, was a most exemplary man and husband. He did his duties as a priest and loved his wife. This did not hinder Mrs. Brown from being insanely jealous. She was one of these uncomfortable women who are always trying to find trouble for themselves and others. As an article of the Athanasian creed, she added what was not generally recited a belief in the absolute depravity of mankind in general and of husbands in particular. The fact that Mrs. Brown never caught her husband sinning was only the more of an incentive for watching him closely. Because he was always good and open and loving she put him down as artful and, behind that, she had a shrewd, tricky man to deal with. And this not so much because she was spiteful or unhappy, but because she was jealous of him and of his reputation.

One reason for this jealousy may have been that she was eleven years older than her husband and of a plain complexion.

She would never allow any one else to doubt or speak ill of him, and she herself would not do the latter to his face. But she held it as her divine right to do the former and keep a watch over him on the quiet.

Only once had she ever been able to secure even a suspicion of her husband. He had once, several years before, shown great interest in a girl of his parish who had gone to the bad. No one else ever thought of the Rev. Alfred Brown in connection with her disappearance, but his wife decided that he needed watching.

There were certain seasons of the year when Mrs. Brown's jealousy became abnormally active. They were in the spring and fall, when the Bishop of Chicago summoned his clergy to meet him at St. Paul's Cathedral in solemn semi-annual conclave, and to these convocations the Rev. Alfred Brown was wont to go, although not a member of the Chicago diocese. It was his one recreation, and they always asked him to address the meeting.

As a general thing, Mr. Brown took his wife with him on these occasions and the couple stopped with a friend on Cass street, near St. James. But in the spring of 1888 this friend was obliged to take a trip to California, and Mr. Brown was obliged to seek quarters elsewhere. A bachelor friend hearing of his difficulty wrote asking him to put up at the North Side Club house during his sojourn in Chicago. Mrs. Brown did not like to trust her husband among a lot of ungodly clubmen, but the spirit of economy was almost as strong in her breast as was the spirit of jealousy, and she at last allowed him to accept the invitation. Mr. Brown accepted her decision with a species of chastened, holy joy which filled the good lady's soul with fears. He was up to something, she knew. An incident which occurred only a few days before he was to leave, heightened her suspicions. Her husband came in one morning with a long face and a solemn tone of voice, and said:

“My dear, I have just heard of a distressing affair. Mary Candee has run away and it is feared that she has gone to marry that scapegrace John Smith, who is connected with a saloon in Chicago. I feel very sorry for her and I hope that I may run across her while attending the spring convocation. If so, I may be of assistance to her or her husband.”

“Alfred,” replied Mrs. Brown, with a most austere look, “if you speak to the abandoned creature you will degrade yourself, and I forbid it.”

“Why, my dear,” the good rector replied, “you must be beside yourself. It is my duty as a priest of the church to help even the lowest. Of course I shall do all that I can to find the poor girl and help her in her trouble.”

“Convocation, indeed,” Mrs. Brown said to herself, when the rector had departed to his study. “A pretty convocation it will be. Why couldn’t he take me with him instead of going to a disreputable bachelor club-house? He meant to meet that girl all the time, and I haven’t a doubt but that he wrote to that old curmudgeon and asked for a room with him so that I could not go along.”

On Monday of the next week, the rector of St. Marks departed for Chicago, sent on his way with the kindly wishes of the whole parish and accompanied by his Senior Warden and a churchman of wealth and piety, who also wished to attend the ecclesiastical meeting.

No sooner was he gone than Mrs. Brown received the means of verifying her suspicions. Monday afternoon the carrier brought her a letter from an old school friend asking her to pass a week or so at her home in Chicago. The invitation was for herself and husband, but she knew she could give a good excuse for going alone and accepted the invitation as a godsend. Besides, her friend was the wife of an old army officer and would enjoy hearing of the matrimonial troubles of a friend! So she sent a friendly note Tuesday morning accepting the invitation. The letter reached Chicago at 2:30 in the afternoon, and just as Mrs. Brown was sitting down to tea a Western Union messenger brought her the following dispatch:

Charlie is away for months. Called suddenly. Come at once. Am dull.

CARRIE BROPHY.

Mrs. Brown’s arrangements were soon made, as they had to be of necessity, for the convocation was to last only from Wednesday till Thursday of the next week. She packed a small valise and took the night train for Chicago, arriving there Wednesday morning. She found her old friend a woman who troubled her husband with her sanctimonious airs. He was an easy going Episcopalian who believed that all he had to do was to attend church occasionally and talk back to the preacher according to book, while she was a Simon-pure Baptist who believed in conversions, baptism, and a godly life.

Owing to the diversity in their ages, the wife had good reason for being jealous of him. So the two ladies enjoyed themselves all Wednesday after noon and evening, the one telling of her husband’s derelictions, and the other telling of her suspicions.

Meanwhile, all unconscious of his wife's close proximity, the Rev. Alfred Brown was enjoying himself immensely. His bachelor friend knew the north end and was able to give him surprising knowledge with regard to that part of the city. They drove in a carriage to the principal points of interest, visited Lincoln Park and saw the bears in the bear pit. Only two things marred Mr. Brown's happiness. He thought of his wife, lonely in Quincy, and of [Mary Candee's] sad future. Before a day had passed he had another trouble. His former parishioner, the girl who had gone wrong, followed him. She had seen him in a cab, had followed and dogged him on every trip, begging for half-dollars. He wished to help her, but her persecutions almost made him decide to take his bachelor friend's advice and hand her over to the police. But Mr. Brown was soft-hearted.

Mrs. Brown inherited from her Puritan ancestors a horror of the theater, but her old school friend overcame her scruples enough to induce her to go and see Irving in "Faust."

"It is improper," the rector's wife said.

"But the moral is good," her friend replied.

So she went, and saw her husband in a box on the opposite side of the theater.

"Look at him !" she said.

"Look at who?" her friend said.

"At my husband! See him the priest, the rector, who came up to attend a convocation of clergymen.

"My!" said her friend; "I did not know your husband was in the city."

"You didn't? Where did you suppose he would be when there was a church convocation in Chicago. You must know, Mrs. Brophy, that my husband has official duties which call him to church councils continually. Still, I will say to you that I don't quite like seeing him with a couple of ladies in a theater box."

And she nursed her wrath in silence till the curtain fell.

"What are you doing?" her friend cried. "Where are you going?"

"I am going to follow my husband."

"But you can't."

"I can," replied, Mrs. Brown, firmly. And she did.

She followed her reverend husband out of the theater and saw him assisting two young ladies into a carriage. They were nieces of the Bishop, but of course she did not know it.

Just as he was turning away a young woman came up and evidently asked him for money. He gave her half a dollar and was turning away, but she clung to him with a persistency which was annoying, if not compromising.

“You ought to hand her over to the police,” said the rector’s bachelor friend. “The girl went to the bad long ago. I have seen her here and know what she is. If she troubles you again forget that you are a clergyman and hand her over to an officer.”

The Rev. Alfred agreed and his friend engaged a Pinkerton detective to follow and protect him.

The next day, the Bishop had decided that the afternoon should be passed in the different parks, and that at 6 o’clock the clergy should assemble at his home on Ontario street for dinner.

Mr. Brown’s bachelor friend accompanied him and together with the Bishop’s nieces they went to Lincoln Park, visited the hot-houses, viewed the gardens, rowed on the lake, and looked at the bears.

Expecting some disturbance, Mr. Brown had told his fair friends about his trouble and what might be expected.

Mrs. Brown was on his track.

For a few moments he left his company to look at the deer in a separate pen nearer the lake and when he returned found the Bishop’s nieces in a peculiar frame of mind.

“You may take us both to the Bishop,” they said.

“What’s the matter?” the clergyman asked.

“Nothing,” one of them replied, “only the girl you told us about came up and denounced you as her husband.”

“This is really too much to bear,” Mr. Brown replied. “I wanted to help the poor girl, but if she cannot respect her friends I must give her over to the police.”

Accordingly, after taking the young ladies to their uncle, the Bishop, he called the detective and gave him instructions to watch closely and arrest any woman who followed or annoyed him or his companions.

Soon after, the detective whispered in one of the niece’s ear.

“Beg pardon, Miss, but I am a detective. Is that woman yonder the one who annoyed you?”

“Yes, it is.”

“All right. Hope you’ll excuse me,” and the detective went over and led the woman to the police station.

The Rev. Alfred Brown passed a pleasant afternoon after that and enjoyed himself at the Bishop’s dinner, which was good and served in true Episcopal manner. After dinner there were speeches and a social, and it was not until nearly midnight that the convocation adjourned.

When the Rev. Alfred Brown reached the club-room he found a telegraphic message:

Come at once. Am in trouble.

THERESA BROWN

“Holy Chasuble! Something awful must have happened! I wonder if thieves have broken in.”

The good father never stopped to look at the date, which was at the North Side police-station, but prepared to go down to Quincy.

While he was eating salmon and enjoying ice-cream at the Bishop’s palace his wife had been enjoying the hospitalities of the police court. When the police magistrate loomed up before her on the morning after her brilliant debut in Lincoln Park, he said:

“What’s she up for?”

“Trying to extort money from the Rev. Alfred Brown, of Quincy, Ill.”

“You lie!” the reverend gentleman’s wife forgot herself so much as to cry. “He is my husband.”

“What, this detective?”

“No; the Rev. Alfred Brown.”

How she managed to work her way out of it we need not inquire, as it is a delicate subject. But work out of it she did, and the next evening, while her husband was supping on a cold meal and wondering why none of the twenty telegrams he had sent that day had brought an answer from his wife, she walked in on him.

“Good heavens, Alf! what are you doing here? I thought you were in Chicago!”

“I was, as you know, Theresa, but this dispatch called me back.”

“This dispatch, why,” and she read it over. “What could have been the matter with you, couldn’t you read? This is dated at the North Side police station in Chicago. Ah! I see, my dear beloved

husband, you got this the night of the banquet and you had taken a cup of wine too much to be able to read straight. Take my advice and don't go to any more of them."

Mr. Brown was mystified, and Mrs. Brown never troubles him with jealousy since. She does not care to watch him any more and he has never learned who sent him that deceptive telegram.

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