

# Beatrice Fairfax

6 Beatrice Fairfax

A Series of Exciting Human Interest Stories Produced by Wharton Inc. Studios for the International Film Service, Inc.

## SEVENTH EPISODE

### A Name for a Baby.

One morning the first letter I opened was from a girl who cried to me from the depths of a woman's greatest tragedy.

Here it is:

"Dear Miss Fairfax:

"I must have a name for my baby. Will you help me? His father, a well-known lawyer, is to be married in a very few days to a girl who doesn't know.

"Anxiously yours,

"MADGE MINTURN.

"Ravine Road, Blue Cove, N. Y."

The oldest tragedy in the world held me in its grip. And just then I came Jimmie Barton, jaunty, debonaire.

He peered over my shoulder, and as he read the first sentence he laughed at the idea of a woman's writing a request that I name her baby.

But as he read the next line of the letter he became very serious.

"Why, it's the very thing we were talking about last night, isn't it? . . . Say, I wonder if this story fits it. He is it. The Conley-Payne wedding—



The Baby Was Not Hurt.

young lawyer marries society bud—bridesmaids—wedding itinerary—usual stuff. Do you suppose he could be the man?" asked Jimmie.

"That seems to be stretching the long arm of circumstances pretty far," said I.

"Well, I have a hunch, and it won't do any harm to find out," remarked Mr. Barton, and sallied forth on his voyage of discovery.

My faith in Jimmie had grown through a long series of episodes where his "hunches" had enabled him to act with frequency as the "God out of the Machine," but nevertheless I consulted a time-table for trains to Blue Cove; and early that afternoon I embarked on my part of a very strange adventure.

Blue Cove is a tumbled-down little village tucked away in the upper part of Winchester county. At the station there were two little carriages of a bygone age, with horses in their shafts which looked as if they were prehistoric relics. I entered one and requested the stupid-looking countryman who drove it to take me to Miss Minturn's cottage.

He didn't look particularly as if he knew where Miss Minturn's cottage was, but at least he offered me a means of locomotion and a chance of meeting someone of a higher order of intelligence than his own.

Presently we came upon a pretty, sad-faced girl carrying an adorable blue-eyed baby in her arms. I called to her and asked if she could tell me where Madge Minturn lived; and, just as I had expected, she turned out to be the girl I was seeking.

She ushered me into a small sitting room which occupied most of the lower floor of a plain, neat little cottage.

I ventured a complimentary remark about her home, and even as I did it the girl caught my hand and held it to her throbbing heart. "It's not a home—it's a prison," she sobbed. "It's where my baby's father hid me away when he got tired of me and decided not to marry me. . . . It does well enough for me.

"Now, Ralph doesn't care for me any more, this is as good a place as any to be buried alive. But there's a baby. He's got some rights—a right to a place in the world and to live and have a name like other boys. And Ralph Conley will have to give him that name."

"Ralph Conley! The man who is going to marry Margaret Payne the day after tomorrow."

Madge looked up and agony and hatred distorted her pretty face.

"Yes," she sobbed.

"I think you had better tell me your story," said I.

This is the story Madge Minturn told:

"Well, Miss Fairfax, I guess it's an old enough story—one you have heard a good many times before. I was sixteen when I came to work in his father's office. I was lonesome and I wanted friends and happiness and a good time like other girls.

"For two years I just worked and ate and slept and got up and dressed and went through the same old rounds again. Then Ralph came home from college and down to the office, and I met him . . . and he said he loved me—and that's all. Here I am. I was just lonesome. I couldn't stand it.

"I wanted to believe him when he said he loved me and was going to marry me; I wanted to believe him—and so I did. I couldn't stand the loneliness any more. But God knows it was better than this. You'll help me, won't you? My boy must have a name. I'll stay buried in this lonely little corner of the world forever, never ask to see Ralph again or be happy or anything. I don't care how lonely I am—I only want a name for my baby.

"Ralph brought me down here—after baby came—and got Mrs. Woods to take care of me. I have not seen Ralph from the time he brought me here, six months ago. I haven't even spoken to him until this morning. He wrote once in a while and I had money and good care—but that wasn't what I wanted.

"Then this morning I got desperate. I telephoned down to the office and asked for Ralph. I told him I didn't want to hold him. I just wanted a name for the baby. If only he'd marry me he could divorce me right afterward and accuse me of anything he liked. I'd stand anything if I could only get a name for baby. It ought to be 'Ralph Conley, Jr.' It's just 'baby' now.

"Ralph sounded nervous and worried, but he said he'd do the right thing. I could just feel his father in back of him. I always thought he would have married me as soon as he knew he ought to—except that his father was so ambitious for him. He's young, and he couldn't get along without his father yet—and I guess he was afraid to try. That's all."

"No, it isn't quite all, Madge. You have a friend now. I am going to help you. I want you to give me a picture of the baby—that will be my greatest ally in helping you."

And when I left a moment later the girl who escorted me to the door was no longer sullen and bitter, but back of all her sobbing she bore an air of hopeful strength.

My country Jehu, dozing over the reins, roused himself as we came out to the dusty roadway. As I clambered into my ramshackle equipage I got a queer glimpse of a tattered old man. A man emerged from the woods which flanked Madge's little cottage and peered toward the house, with a certain sinister air.

For a second I was tempted to go back and tell Madge—but I decided that I could best serve her by hurrying to the city and tending to her real need instead of rousing her to fearful consciousness of a passing tramp. If I could enlist the sympathies of Margaret Payne I would be doing far more for Madge Minturn than merely dowering with my own interest.

Just before we reached the station the other ramshackle, "one-hoss-shay" passed us. One passenger was bouncing around with the same ill-easiness I was forced to betray. I glimpsed a good-looking, well-groomed young fellow who suggested some of the furtive weakness I had seen on the face of the tramp.

I told myself I didn't like the natives of Blue Cove—nor yet its visitors—but a moment later I passed the visitor I did like. It was Jimmie.

Mr. Barton was riding a ramshackle bicycle which seemed to belong to exactly the same vintage from which came the city's carriages.

"All aboard the wreck!" cried Jimmie, halting me with joy as he pedaled his miserable two-wheeled monstrosity up the hill.

"You're much more friendly than the other city chap I just passed," said I. "He pulled his hat over his eyes and didn't give a fellow traveler any 'hail and farewell!'"

Jimmie laughed. "No, I guess not—seeing as how he probably surmised that you had just come from visiting the lady toward whom he is now bound. . . . You see, the gentleman you just met happens to be Ralph Conley."

So Ralph Conley had come to see his baby! I wondered if father-love would impel him to give the child a name.

A little while later a maid admitted me to a wonderful library of the Italian renaissance period. At the side of a stone fireplace sat a young flower

of the aristocracy. She greeted me with well-bred indifference which was not particularly propitious for Madge Minturn.

"Miss Payne, I have come on a mission that is as hideously unpleasant for me as it must be cruel for you. Try to be patient with me—you owe it to yourself as well as to me to give me a hearing," said I.

And then I showed her the photograph of Madge Minturn's baby—the baby whose immature face bore so strange a likeness to Ralph Conley's. Miss Payne looked at it coldly; there was no encouragement in her manner.

And when I began to talk, to tell her Madge Minturn's pathetic little story, she did what she felt loyalty to Ralph Conley demanded of her—she fairly ordered me from the house.

"You know this isn't a particularly comfortable situation for me. I have a little pride, too, Miss Payne; I'm used to being welcomed to houses—ordered from them," said I. "But I am going to appeal to the splendid womanliness I feel you possess. Won't you be fair—won't you give me a hearing?"

And then as I told my story Margaret Payne listened—at first with an air of sneering superiority, then with a certain breathless, growing horror, and finally with the manner of one who is too stunned to realize her own misery. Suddenly the girl rallied; her pride, her breeding and her innate fineness rose to meet the needs of this supreme moment.

"It seems impossible that I should be believing evil of Ralph—and for him to be so weak is the most terrible evil I can think of. . . . How could he have said he loved me while—while this was going on? Ralph isn't worthy—and yet both of us care. But I'll never marry him now."

I interrupted, eagerly: "Miss Payne, you've taken this like the thoroughbred I knew you were. Ralph Conley isn't fine enough for you—perhaps he isn't even good enough for weak little Madge Minturn—lonely little Madge Minturn, I should say. But she loves him—and there's the baby. She wants a name for the baby. That's the only justice anyone can do anyone else in this whole sad tangle of weak human nature at its weakest. We can get a name for that baby."

"I don't think he'll marry her, Miss Fairfax. I think he's over caring—and, besides, he can't act independently of his father."

"I have a plan. Will you help me?"

"Yes," said Margaret, quietly. "I'll help you—tell me."

And so I told her my plan. She listened to me with self-control, which won me to a friendship for Margaret Payne which the years have never diminished, and at last she said, quietly:

"I'm tired now—too tired to think. A little stunned, too, perhaps. You don't want me to just let you impose your will on mine, do you, Miss Fairfax? I thought not. Well, suppose I telephone you this evening?"

We left it that way and I started back to the office. I felt I might be needed there.

When I arrived I telephoned Madge. Mrs. Woods answered the phone, and in a voice which shook with genuine anxiety she said to me: "Madge? She's been gone some time. I never knew her to stay out so long. She went right after you came—and she isn't back yet. She was carrying that heavy baby, too. I'm getting kind of worried."

Disquieting thoughts of the tramp and of Ralph Conley fluttered across my brain.

Just then Jimmie returned, but when I told him of my conversation with Mrs. Woods my debonaire and cheerful young friend wore an unwelcome expression of anxiety.

"I am going back," said he. "I don't like this one bit."

"Yes—I think you'd better go back," said I, "but not alone. I'm going, too."

As we made our return trip to Blue Cove, Jimmie told me his part of the story: Directly we suspected that Conley was the man in the case, Jimmie had gone down to the law offices of

Conley & Conley and had sent in his card requesting an interview.

"The interview" was readily granted, but surprise swung to instant dismay when Jimmy fairly hurled a question at the younger man. "Do you know Madge Minturn?"

Of course young Conley swore he had never heard of the girl—but astute Jimmy noticed that the match with which the lawyer was lighting his cigarette had flickered out very suddenly—but not before it burned the trembling fingers which were holding it.

A tiny bit of evidence that—but Jimmy, the sleuth, knew it was worth following up, and when half an hour later Richard Conley hurried into the Grand Central and embarked on a train for Blue Cove, Jimmy was close on his tracks.

Conley took the second of the town's supply of ramshackle cabs, and Jimmy had to purchase an even more ramshackle bicycle. As you know, he passed me on my return to the station—but as you do not know, he turned to wave a farewell and blow me an audacious kiss.

"That kiss didn't get me much, Miss Beatrice," laughed Jimmy. "Nothing but an encounter with a stone and a tumble which smashed none of my ribs but all of the bicycle's vital organs. I had to go on foot after that and by the time I caught up with my quarry he was coming out of the woods, and I concluded that he had finished his interview with the girl—but I was in time to see another interview begin.

"Conley bumped into a queer looking chap. I found out later that he's the village character—some of them call him looney and some of them say he's a hermit, but all the brave inhabitants of Blue Cove seem a little afraid of him."

Jimmie had discovered this much and that the chap's name was Harry Wilkins.

"And I have a hunch, Miss Beatrice, that Harry Wilkins and Richard Conley went through some transaction that boded very little good for your friend, Madge Minturn!"

"Do you remember just where Conley and Wilkins went?" I asked.

"Yes, and that's where we're bound. You're going to see a tumble-down little cabin which houses an absolute renegade. And I think there'll be a rather startling denouement and a crusher for the plans of Wilkins, Conley and Conley."

And more than that Jimmy refused to say.

In a lonely nook of the woods we came upon the cabin. Jimmy hid me behind a clump of bushes and hurried forward alone.

Suddenly a sound came to my ears. It was a woman's shriek—a call for help in a voice which sounded definitely familiar.

Automatically I rushed out from hiding and hurried toward the cabin. As Jimmy turned the knob of the door there was one wild, agonized scream which became suddenly muffled and was followed by a thick pall of silence.

A second more and I was the witness of a wild struggle. Wilkins was fighting with the physical strength a man whose mental ability is far below par often displays. It took all Jimmy's science to master him. But at last he conquered.

In a corner of the cabin crouched Madge, sobbing violently that we had come just in time, and that if we had been a minute later there would have been a tragic story for the journalist to tell the world.

"But my baby, Miss Fairfax—make him find my baby. If anything's happened to little Richard I'm going to kill myself."

"Wilkins," said Jimmy, sternly, "it will be just as well for you if nothing unpleasant has happened to little Richard. First, we'll find him, and then you'll give a little explanation of your performance this afternoon. I think I can guess just about what it has been, but I won't do any guessing. You'll talk and I'll take down in writing every word you say. Now march, and be quick about it."

The frightened creature obeyed almost automatically. Sheer terror had



It Took All of Jimmy's Science to Master Him.



"Have You Thought of the Other Girl?"

gripped his brutish mind and body.

"I left the kid in the barn," said he.

"I guess he's all right."

We found the baby lying in the straw crying with a lusty vigor which gave evidence of the fact that he had not been very badly injured.

"And now my man we'll have your story," said Jimmy. "I'll take it down and Miss Fairfax will sign as a witness, and you can be glad that I let you off with a thrashing and a talking to—for what you've done would land you in prison all right—if I thought you were responsible for it."

"I seen this here girl comin' out of the woods this mornin' carryin' the kid. She looked kinder good to me—an' I ain't so crazy about women neither."

"I liked her kinder, and then when I seen a good-lookin' chap drive up this afternoon and her a-greetin' him so lovin' I got awful mad—kinder jealous."

"Him and her went a walkin' in the woods, takin' the kid along, an' I followed and listened to what they was a-sayin'."

"I wanted her for my girl—and I didn't like the idea of no city chap comin' to see her and likin' her himself."

"Then all of a sudden I kinder got wise to the fact that he didn't like her none too well—that he was kinder afraid of her. She was holdin' up the kid an' pleadin' with him, and he was fidgetin' around kinder uneasy and like he wished he was anywhere else. I got wise to the sort of a girl she was then—"

Madge interrupted suddenly. "Oh, Miss Fairfax, don't let him talk about me like that. I can't bear to think what he's going to say about me next to you and Mr. Barton."

"Never mind what he says about you next to us," said Jimmy, in his very, friendliest tone. "I've got your number, little girl. What I want is somebody else's—now, do you remember just what Conley said when you showed him—his boy?"

"Oh, yes, sir; indeed I do. These were his words: 'I'll do the right thing, Madge, but let me break the news to Margaret in my own way.'"

"Did you hear that?" asked Jimmy, turning suddenly on Wilkins.

"I sure did. And I seen him kiss her and swear to it—but I knew he meant money," added the fellow.

Then the story went on, Wilkins and Madge corroborating each other.

Jimmie had arrived just in time to see Conley step out of the woods and then return hastily, as if he had forgotten something. As a matter of fact, he had forgotten a check for five hundred dollars—with which he had expected to buy off the girl to whom he owed love, loyalty and protection.

The other in the meantime, seeing his path clear to reach the girl, was about to confront Madge. Then his acute sense of hearing warned him of his rival's return, and instead he turned and faced the city man.

Each of them expected an attack. Finally Conley asked Wilkins if he had been following the girl, and, if so, why.

Having decided that he was a match for his rival, Wilkins insolently answered: "Well, what if I was?"

"What I want to know is, are you interested in her—are you in love with her? Would you like to marry her?"

Wilkins' reply was an evil grin.

"Well, you can have her and a thousand dollars in cash—but you'll have to marry her—and be good to her and the baby—mighty good. Do you understand?" asked Conley.

And so it was arranged. Richard Conley and Wilkins hatched their plot.

Madge was wandering through the woods toward her own home, crooning to her baby, almost cheerfully.

Baby glimpsed a patch of red flowers at the top of a bank by the roadside and began screaming lustily for them. To quiet him Madge laid him in the grass and climbed after the bright objects which had attracted the little lad. A minute later she returned triumphantly bringing the flowers.

Baby was gone! Then the mother heard its cries and followed the sound. Straight to the cabin those cries led her. And when the mother reached the door of the

dilapidated cottage she plunged in to rescue her baby. The man flung the door shut after her and bolted it. Then he seized her and fastened her securely. A second later he hurried out, carrying the baby away under her tortured eyes.

"I hid the kid in the barn, an' then I went back and told the girl she's got to marry me or else I'd leave the kid to starve. It was lots of fun seein' her cry and beg for mercy—more than I knew when Conley thought of the plan an' I made the bargain with him."

Mother love prevailed—nothing mattered but the life of the baby. Madge knew she was going to utter degradation. But she was ready; she must brave all for the sake of her baby.

But wave on wave of horror went over her when Wilkins seized her and crushed her in his arms. She felt herself helpless to cope with the force of his brutality; she thought herself alone in these gloomy woods, but normal instincts of self-preservation had made her shriek for help, and her cries had led Jimmy and me straight to the cabin door.

And that was the story Wilkins told and I witnessed.

Jimmie and I had been sent special invitations to the "Conley-Payne" wedding. When we entered the Payne drawing room and I beheld the floral altar of marvelous roses banked across one end of the room, my heart gave a sudden contraction, half fear and half pity.

And then Richard Conley entered the room and crossed to the floral altar back of which stood the surprised minister. His face was chalk white.

In the front row of spectators stood Richard's father—dominant, arrogant, Winchester Payne, banker and diplomat, entered his drawing room, and on his arm leaned the veiled figure of the bride.

And then the ceremony began—the ceremony which gave Margaret to Richard as wife.

Presently it was finished and the minister pronounced the benediction.

Then the groom leaned forward and threw back the bride's veil. I clutched Jimmy's arm and watched the guests. A stir went through the assemblage of guests. Richard Conley, Sr., leaped forward with a shout of rage.

For when the bride's veil was thrown back the face framed in the folds of white tulle was not that of Margaret Payne, but of a stary-eyed, tremulous girl whom Jimmy and I had substituted for the bride.

"It isn't legal. I'll have it annulled!" shrieked Conley, senior.

But Richard Conley said nothing. A little muscle across his jaw was twitching and his eyes had grown very dark and were shining with a clear steadiness. Some purpose seemed to be setting his weak mouth into a mold—was it stubbornness or strength?

"Oh, I guess it's legal all right," said Jimmy, stepping forward and holding out a paper—the signed confession of Wilkins. "You see this is a license making it legal. Mrs. Richard Conley, Jr., got it today."

And then another actor came upon the scene. In the doorway stood the butler leading Harry Wilkins—the evil man of the Blue Cove. Jimmy pointed to him and spoke in a low voice to Richard.

"If it isn't legal, you will make it so or go to the penitentiary."

At Jimmy's words, Richard Conley's lips twisted into a scarl. "Go to the penitentiary on the word of the village idiot!" said he. "Well, I guess not—how dare you folks interfere? What do you mean by playing providence like this? Have you thought of the other girl, of Margaret?"

But before we could answer, Margaret Payne appeared in the doorway of her home. In her arms was the little nameless blue-eyed baby which looked so much like the father who had never owned it. And then a sudden change came across Richard Conley's face. There is an instinct of fatherhood, too. He walked over to the side of the girl he had meant to marry and from her arms he took his baby.

"Come, Madge—we'll go home," said he. Perhaps there was not love and longing in his voice—but I think there was tenderness even then.

(END OF SEVENTH EPISODE)