

**THE BEAUTIFUL WRETCH:
THE FOUR
MACNICOLS; THE PUPIL
OF AURELIUS, VOL. III**

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The Beautiful Wretch: The Four MacNicol's; The Pupil of Aurelius, Vol. III by William Black

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WILLIAM BLACK

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Three Stories, in Three Volumes

BY
WILLIAM BLACK
AUTHOR OF 'MACLEOD OF DARE,' 'SUNRISE,' ETC.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

AT LAST.

HE found Frank King in the little room in Cleveland Row, alone, sitting before the fire, a shut book on the small table beside him.

'I've got bad news for you, King,' he said, bluntly. 'I wish it hadn't been my sister. But you know what women are. It's better to have nothing at all to do with them.'

'But what is it?' Frank King said, with some alarm on his face.

'Madge has bolted.'

'Madge has bolted?' the other repeated, staring at Mr. Tom in a bewildered sort of way.

'Yes. Gone and married that fellow Hanbury. This morning. I'm very sorry I have to come to you with a story like that about my own sister.'

Mr. Tom was very much surprised to find his friend jump up from the chair and seize him by the arm.

'Do you know this, Beresford,' he said, in great excitement, 'you have taken a millstone from my neck. I have been sitting wondering whether I shouldn't cut my throat at once, or make off for Australia——'

'Oh, come, I say!' interposed Mr. Tom, with a quick flush.

'Oh, you needn't think I have anything to say against your sister,' exclaimed his

friend—on whose face there was a sudden and quite radiant gladness. 'You don't understand it at all, Beresford. It will take some explanation. But I assure you you could not have brought me pleasanter news; and yet I have not a word to say against your sister. I know that is a privilege you reserve for yourself; and quite right too.'

It was manifestly clear that Captain King was not shamming satisfaction: not for many a day had his face looked so bright.

'Well, I'm glad you take it that way,' said Mr. Tom. 'I thought you would be cut up. Most fellows are; though they pretend not to be. I really do believe you're rather glad that Madge has given you the slip.'

'Sit down, Beresford, and I will tell you